NEA Today

February 1999
Vol. 17, No. 5
Washington, D.C.

The Newspaper for M
of the National Educ

Thinking About Refinancing? See page 33

Totally Professional

Sue Florence always knew she was a good teacher. Thanks to national certification, now everyone knows.

see page 4

NEA Today

February 1999
Volume 17, Number 5

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NEA Today (ISSN 0734-7219) is published eight times a year, monthly, in September, October, November, January, February, March, April, and May by the National Education Association, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036-3290.

Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to NEA Membership Records, Attn: NEA Today Address Change, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Telephone: 202/822-7207.

NEA Today is mailed to all NEA members as a benefit of membership. Nonmember subscription price: $35 domestic and $58 foreign. For members, subscriptions represent $3.45 of annual dues.

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GCU 1097M

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Earn a Black Belt in Teaching

President's Viewpoint

My top 10 reasons why you should consider National Board certification.

By 1993, Doris Mauer had been teaching language arts to fifth and sixth graders in Cedar Falls, Iowa, for 36 years.

With one year until retirement, she could have coasted through her classes. But instead, Mauer opted to spend the last year of her career engaged in the rigorous process of National Board certification. Why?

"I always knew I was a good teacher," she says. "I just wanted somebody else to say it."

Finally, American educators have a definitive set of teaching standards at their fingertips—and a way to measure their ability to live up to them.

The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification program gives teachers a shot at professional mastery akin to earning a black belt in teaching.

National Board certification enhances teachers' skills, increases our stature, and improves the education of children. Simply put, there's no better professional development opportunity.

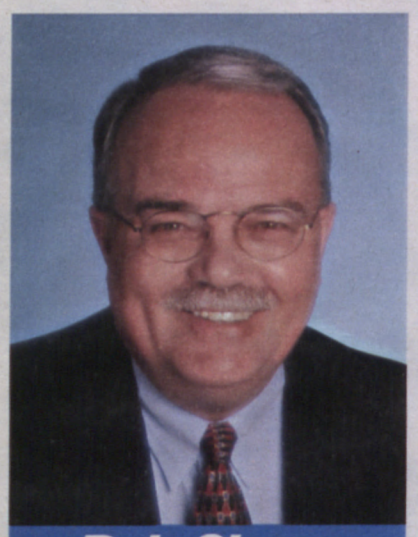
That's why NEA has made Board certification a top priority. We've committed a section of our budget to help affiliates recruit and support new candidates across the country.

Yet many of you, I know, already feel overburdened in your classrooms. And the year-long Board certification process requires extensive written and videotaped documentation of instruction inside the classroom, as well as evaluations, portfolios, and tests.

Many of you may ask: Why bother?

And so, I've compiled Bob's Top 10 Reasons Why Teachers Should Apply for National Board Certification:

10. You're good enough, you're smart enough, and, doggone it, people should know it. Certification is a national validation and recognition of your abilities. It's like the *Good Housekeeping* seal of approval—to the 10th power—for teaching. The public recognizes and respects it.



Bob Chase

9. Standards so clear you can see yourself in them. For the first time, teachers have a concrete set of national standards that make it clear just what we should be teaching and how we should measure our effectiveness as teachers. We no longer have to struggle in the dark, second-guessing expectations or our abilities.

> National certification is like the *Good Housekeeping* seal of approval—to the 10th power—for teaching.

8. It's a teacher thing. The majority of "experts" on the National Board are teachers. Certification is a professional development tool created by teachers, for teachers. It's not a theoretical "reform" model created by those who've never set foot in a classroom.

7. It's not some Mickey Mouse in-service. "With Board certification, everything takes place in the classroom," reports Joan Celestino, a Board certified teacher in North Carolina. "You develop lesson plans that you actually use. The process involves your own students. Your teaching becomes enriched—whether or not you get certified. You can't lose."

6. Even Pavlov's dogs got biscuits. More states and districts are offering financial and professional rewards for Board certification. Thirteen states offer financial supplements, ranging from a $500 bonus in Wisconsin to a 12 percent pay raise in North Carolina (see page 6). Some states allow for license portability. Others count Board certification toward licensure renewal or continuing education units.

5. Make friends and influence people. Nationally certified teachers report that they enjoy greater clout and credibility. They're often called upon as experts, consultants, or spokespeople in their communities.

4. No more "been there, done that." If you're a long-time teacher, certification is a way to reinvigorate yourself professionally and boldly go where you have never gone before. As Doris Mauer told me, "People think that once you're in the classroom, you never change. I just wanted to prove that this old gal could do it."

3. It's a professional power tool. Certification supercharges your ability to teach by example—as either a mentor or an inspiration to your colleagues. And it uplifts the profession overall: By putting us in charge of standards and excellence, it raises our professional stature in the public arena.

2. Make history. As a social studies teacher, I view Board certification as an historic opportunity. Never before has our profession been able to rally around a model and declare: This is what great teaching looks like.

1. Be all that you can be. "Do it because it makes you a better teacher, and do it to make things better for kids," says Iowa's Mauer.

I couldn't put it better myself.

Comments? You can E-mail me directly at BobChase@nea.org.

NEA at a Glance

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Did You Know...
The current NEA budget sets aside resources to help reach the goal of 100,000 teachers certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. With those resources, NEA is helping state and local affiliates develop support systems for teachers interested in becoming nationally certified. For details on the process, turn to pages 4, 5, and 6 of this issue.

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NEA Today February '99

Celebrate Seuss!

March 2 is Read Across America Day. NEA members in Escondido, California (above) are ready. Are you? Get fancy new certificates of participation for students on the Web at www.nea.org/readacross. For Seuss hats, stickers, and posters, call 800/736-8018.

Cover Story

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Why would Sue Florence, right—an experienced teacher, mother, Association activist, and church volunteer—choose to spend hundreds of hours applying for certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards? Find out on page 4. If you're still skeptical, get answers to your toughest questions from the teacher who chairs the National Board on page 6.

Kristin Prelipp

Cover photo by Kristin Prelipp

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Put Yourself

National Board certification suits Sue Florence — and her students — just fine. Is it time for you to start thinking about becoming nationally certified yourself?

Sue Florence is a whirlwind of activity. She's been teaching full-time for 23 years. She's active in her NEA affiliate, school district, community, and church. She's a wife and mother of two teenagers. She mentors colleagues. And, in her spare time, she serves as president of her local sorority chapter, tutors at-risk kids, and loves to cook.

So why did Florence choose this time in her life to take on the biggest challenge of her career? Why did she choose to invest *200 hours* in applying for certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards?

"I wanted to measure my own abilities and make sure I was in line with what was considered current and best practice for students," says Florence, who teaches third grade at Central Elementary in Hillsborough, North Carolina.

In the past four years, thousands of teachers just like Sue Florence have taken on the challenge of national certification. Florence is one of 1,836 teachers nationwide who have so far succeeded. In the past year alone, the rate of teachers seeking and earning national certification has doubled.

The National Board—with full backing from NEA (see page 2)—is focusing much of its $34 million budget on getting even more teachers certified. Last year, the federal government kicked in an additional $18.5 million to support the process.

National certification—a blip on most teachers' radar screens five years ago—has become a critical step for many in the quest for higher standards for both teachers and students.

State and local governments and school boards are rewarding those who achieve national certification—with higher salaries and leadership roles (see page 6). Some are even helping teachers find the time and money to take on the challenge.

Two years ago, in the fall of 1996, North Carolina's Florence decided to take advantage of the help her state offered to those willing to put themselves to the test (see next page).

From talking to others who'd been through the rigorous national certification process, Florence knew what she was in for.

Kristin Prelipp

Sue Florence, a 23-year veteran, says national certification has made her a better teacher—for third grader Rick Williams and all his peers.

The national certification exam is no multiple choice test. To meet the tough standards designed and tested by teachers, candidates must prepare an extensive portfolio. In it, they must include reflective writing, lesson plans, student work, and videotapes of their teaching.

Building a good portfolio, which summarizes years of knowledge, can take months.

"I said 'bye-bye' to my husband and kids and set up a computer in my dining room," says Florence.

"I'd sit at the computer and read and write until about nine o'clock, then I'd do my lesson planning and grade papers well into the night. There was not a single weekend I didn't work on national board stuff, including Thanksgiving and Christmas break."

When summer rolled around, Florence spent an eight-hour stint at one of the Board's assessment centers in Raleigh, answering essay questions about effective teaching practices.

One year and 200 work hours later, Florence received word that she had passed. She would be nationally certified as an Early Childhood Generalist.

Was it all worth it? Florence—like nearly all teachers who've gone through the process, pass or fail—has no doubts.

"I'll never teach the same way again," she declares.

"Meeting the National Board standards has caused me to reflect on my teaching with a whole different perspective," Florence adds. "Instead of just doing tasks and moving on to the next thing, now I automatically reflect on *why* I do certain things.

"I always knew that I was a very strong teacher. Becoming certified lets everyone know that I'm an accomplished teacher and can provide appropriate and effective instruction for my students."

Florence says the process of reflecting and writing about her teaching helped validate many of her practices and improve upon others.

Here are just a few of the ways Florence says the process of becoming nationally certified paid off for her—and her students:

■ Better planning and organization. Florence describes herself as a much better "planner and doer" since achieving certification.

After meticulously planning her national certification portfolio and sticking to timelines, she says, "It's so much easier for me to plan my school year and figure out lesson plans well in advance."

She has also organized students into teams that flow smoothly between whole class and small group instruction in math, reading, and writing.

The structure helps make sure kids get instruction according to their individual needs. And it helps with classroom discipline.

"I haven't had to deal with many behavior problems this year," says Florence. "Preparing for board certification helped me reflect on how to troubleshoot before problems occur.

"When you have children who are bored or without a task to complete, then they will go visiting and get into trouble. So I avoid that."

■ Effective assessment. Student assessment in Florence's class is an ongoing activity.

"It's no longer about waiting until my students sit down to take a test. After each task, I ask questions on the spot to make sure they're comprehending," she says.

"Students know I'm going to ask them about everything they do,

to the Test

whether it's a story they've read or a visit to another classroom. So they're always thinking about what they've just accomplished."

Since certification, Florence consistently requires students to show, not just recite, their understanding of a lesson.

For example, students were asked to explain a sequence of events in the novel *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. Florence had the students cut a sheet of paper into pie wedges. Students wrote and illustrated story events on separate wedges, then assembled the "pie" to re-create the story.

"Before, I might have the children pick events from multiple choice answers. By assembling the pie, I know they have a deeper understanding of the story they've read."

■ Creating a caring classroom environment. In this area, national certification helped reinforce Florence's feeling that she was already doing something right.

"Kids have very strong feelings. I believe in letting them attack the problem, and play a role in making the class a place they all feel comfortable."

Florence demonstrated how she accomplishes this in the video portion of her national certification portfolio.

"Some students wanted to change the way work centers in the room were set up," she says. "I had them break into small groups to brainstorm solutions, then come together to reach consensus."

Reviewing the video and writing about the problem-solving process reinforced Florence's commitment to continue these techniques.

■ A stronger professional voice. Florence had built a pretty impressive résumé of professional accomplishments before applying for certification.

She served as president of the Orange County Association of Educators, designed teacher training programs, and helped create the North Carolina Teacher Academy.

Since certification, the Orange County superintendent asked Florence to help develop an incentive package for other local teachers seeking certification. Florence now mentors National Board candidates statewide through the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching. And she also serves as vice chair of the Instructional and Professional Development committee for the North Carolina Association of Educators.

"There's definitely a certain credibility that comes along with the national certificate," Florence says. "I feel my opinion is respected more on a wider scale, and I can play a bigger role in shaping my profession."

■ Greater self-esteem. National certification brings both professional *and* personal growth.

Says Florence: "I feel a lot more secure in my own judgments about what's an educational fad and what's effective classroom practice."

In many ways, becoming board certified was a personal challenge for Florence.

"I think there's a stereotype that National Board certification isn't something you see teachers from rural areas doing, or African-American teachers doing. Well, I'm African-American. I teach in a rural area. And I did it. I think the pool of certified teachers ought to be reflective of the wide diversity of teachers we have in this country."

—Karen Gutloff

Kristin Prellpp

North Carolina's Sue Florence did her homework to prepare for National Board certification—much of it at this computer station on her dining room table.

What's So Special About North Carolina Teachers?

Of the 2.7 million teachers in the United States today, about 75,000—or 2.8 percent—teach in North Carolina.

Of the 1,836 teachers who have so far passed the rigorous National Board assessment process and become nationally certified, 29.2 percent are from North Carolina.

Why are North Carolina teachers so disproportionately represented in the early ranks of national certified teachers? Are they smarter or more dedicated than teachers in other states?

Not likely. But there is a huge difference between North Carolina and the rest of the country that can help explain these numbers.

Four years ago, Governor Jim Hunt and the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE), working with the state legislature, secured a host of benefits for Board candidates, including a waiver of the $2,000 application fee and three days leave for portfolio preparation.

Number of Nationally Certified Teachers in North Carolina

536

Total Number of Nationally Certified Teachers in U.S.

1,836

Each year, NCAE sponsors dozens of workshops on how to prepare for certification and runs an E-mail listserv so educators can help each other. And, in North Carolina, any teacher who achieves national certification gets a 12 percent raise, thanks to a law the Association backed.

NCAE's work has become a model for other NEA state and local affiliates, which are beginning to offer similar support—financial incentives, teacher training, and networking opportunities.

The Florida Teaching Profession (FTP-NEA) last year successfully lobbied the state legislature to pony up $1,800 of the $2,000 assessment fee. Florida teachers also get a 10 percent salary increase upon receiving certification, and an additional 10 percent increase if they become peer mentors.

The Iowa State Education Association threw its support to legislation that grants nationally certified teachers a $10,000 annual salary supplement.

Oklahoma teachers who earn national certification receive a $5,000 annual salary bonus, thanks to a lobbying push by the Oklahoma Education Association.

The OEA has also hired two university professors to teach reflective writing to Board candidates. And OEA offers critiques of candidates' portfolio videotapes.

NEA locals are also busy negotiating support for national certification.

In Ohio, the Columbus Education Association (CEA), in partnership with Ohio State University, sponsors two National Board preparation courses.

Kentucky's Fayette County Education Association pays half of a candidate's application fee. And the Association bargained three release days for portfolio preparation.

Asking the Tough Questions

NEA member Barbara Kelley, a physical education teacher at the Vine Street School in Bangor, Maine, is chair of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. She recently answered the tough questions about National Board certification, posed by NEA Today*'s Karen Gutloff.*

Why should terrific teachers apply for national certification?

There's never a point at which you're perfect. There's always a way to improve your lessons or how you assess your students. Many teachers seek certification to measure themselves against the National Board standards. It's very affirming to be able to say "I see myself reflected in these standards."

What do the standards measure?

The standards ask teachers to demonstrate knowledge of their content area and how to teach it, effective classroom management and assessment, systematic thinking about classroom practice, and collaboration with parents and colleagues.

How do educators know these are the best standards to compare themselves to?

The standards are largely set by classroom teachers—they make up the majority of the National Board's committees. The committees are also composed of researchers, university professors, and education experts throughout the country. In addition, hundreds of teachers around the country give feedback on the standards prior to their final approval.

Is certification something every teacher should go for?

There's no typical candidate. We have some certified teachers with three years experience, and some with 34 years experience.

If someone is thinking about it, I'd say get a copy of the standards for your area to see if you really are ready. Look at what's being asked of you, and ask yourself, "Am I already there or do I still need to grow?"

You may find you've been teaching in isolation and need more time to improve some areas of your practice.

Why are there so few minority Board-certified teachers?

We have been very disappointed in the small number of minority teachers who are certified. The National Board is absolutely committed to identifying and eliminating any identifiable source of bias from our system.

We've spent $2 million on research studies to make sure the process is free from bias. So far, we have found no source of bias, but we will continue to examine the standards, assessments, and scoring system.

As the number of total candidates grows and support systems for all candidates expand, we anticipate increased numbers of National Board-certified teachers of all ethnicities.

How does the Board plan to get more teachers involved?

We're looking at what kinds of support are most useful to candidates. The most important is to get access to the process. It costs $2,000 to participate. We want to help teachers find ways to get that fee paid.

Another way is to have teachers bargain release time to go through certification. We also work with states to increase salary incentives for certified teachers.

Should certified teachers be paid more than their peers?

I think so. Just as teachers are paid more for gaining extra continuing education credits or for having a master's degree, they should be paid for demonstrating increased professional achievement through certification.

If my state or district offers no raise for becoming nationally certified, why bother?

Teachers are drawn to the process by more than just pay.

I know of one teacher who achieved certification one year before her retirement. She told me, "I always knew I was a good teacher, I just wanted somebody else to say it." National certification is the first process we have in which teachers are acknowledged as the experts.

Is national certification fostering divisions by creating an elite class of teachers?

Just as initial licensure is a part of the career continuum, so is national certification. If we look a decade ahead, advanced certification will be accepted as a part of the profession.

What we're doing is taking charge of our profession. We're creating a place for accomplished teachers who have been identified by their peers.

Why are some folks still waiting for standards or assessments in their content areas?

More than two-thirds of the standards are already complete, and the standards for music, foreign language, and library/media specialists will be up for public comment in 1999.

We are in the process of pilot testing assessments for teachers of exceptional needs students, vocational education, and English as a new language. These assessments will be offered for the first time in the 1999-2000 school year.

Teachers in content areas like physical education, who are waiting for their assessments to be developed, should get copies of the standards and familiarize themselves with them.

For details on how to participate in pilot testing, contact Melissa Nolan at the Educational Testing Service, 800-779-3339, ext. 5312. Fax: 609/734-5450. E-mail: mnolan@ets.org.

Resources

■ The NEA Higher Education Loan Program offers loans to help NEA members pay the $2,000 assessment fee for National Board certification. For information, contact NEA Member Benefits toll-free at 888/4-NEA-HELP, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. ET.

■ *Guide to National Board Certification 1998-1998*, published by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, lists standards for the 12 certification areas now available (see box at right) and provides details on the application and assessment process.

For free copies, contact the Board at P.O. Box 839959, San Antonio, TX 78283-3959. Or call 800/532-1813.

Visit the Board's Web site at www.nbpts.org for more information.

■ Visit the NEA Web site at www.nea.org/teaching for a list of the most common questions and answers about National Board certification. Scroll the list of topics until you get to "National Board Certification."

Fast Facts on National Certification

■ For this school year, there are more than 6,000 candidates for National Board certification. That's more than double the 2,000 who sought certification in 1997-98.

■ The average pass rate for national certification in 1997-98 was 47 percent.

■ Teachers with a minimum of three years experience, a B.A. degree, and a valid state teaching license can apply for certification.

■ Candidates pay $2,000 to participate in the process.

■ The federal government provides state subsidies to pay half of a teacher's $2,000 application fee.

■ The National Board is governed by a 63-member board of directors, the majority of whom are classroom teachers.

■ As of the 1998-99 school year, national certification is available in 12 teaching areas: early childhood/generalist; middle childhood/generalist; early adolescence/generalist; early adolescence/English language arts; early adolescence/mathematics; early adolescence/science; early adolescence/social studies-history; early adolescence through young adulthood/art; adolescence and young adulthood/English language arts; adolescence and young adulthood/mathematics; adolescence and young adulthood/science; adolescence and young adulthood/social studies-history.

■ Candidates complete a two-part system: First, they submit a portfolio containing student work, videotapes, and reflective writing on classroom practice. Then, they take a day-long test on teaching practice at a local assessment center.

■ Candidates spend an average of 200 hours preparing for certification.

■ Candidates typically receive their start-up packets between June and December and must complete their portfolios between April and June. The assessment center portion of the application can be completed between June and July. Results are given no later than December 31 of the next year.

■ Candidates who do not achieve certification on their initial try can "bank" individual entry scores for up to three years, and re-take the portions they did not complete successfully. It costs $275 for each exercise the candidate retakes.

■ National Board certificates are valid for 10 years. Certificates may be renewed at that time.

Across the Country

Our Nation's Seuss Sensation

NEA's second Read Across America celebration promises to be bigger and better than the first.

I. George Bilyk

The nation's largest literacy event ever, last year's Read Across America, is about to be topped by a reading celebration the likes of which even the Cat in the Hat never dreamed of. Be sure to join the fun on March 2, 1999.

Last year, an estimated 10 million children celebrated reading on Dr. Seuss's birthday on March 2, making Read Across America the largest reading event this country has ever seen.

NEA members and event organizers predict that this year's celebration will be bigger, better, and brassier than last year's event. That's a safe bet, given the following:

■ **Rare Dares:** Last year, no one was eating worms. This year, a Tennessee principal has challenged his students: Read 10,000 books and he'll eat what will feel like 10,000 worms.

Last year, a few big city mayors read with children. This year, one big city mayor is finalizing plans for a cold March swim to reward students for meeting his reading challenge.

■ **Community Unity:** Last year, the honor society at Overland High School in Aurora, Colorado, read with first graders. This year, students from the entire high school are making plans to read with thousands of elementary students in their area. And they're organizing high school students statewide to follow their lead.

Last year, in Culpepper, Virginia, eight hearty volunteers organized a community spaghetti dinner and reading celebration with a special Pin the Tail on the Cat game for 500 townspeople. This year, dozens of people have already volunteered to pitch in.

In Haverhill, Massachusetts, last year, business leaders from the Exchange Club read in all the city's first grade classes. This year, they'll do it again—*and* give a book to every first grader in town.

■ **Star Reader Leaders:** Last year, Kirk Douglas taped a reading of *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* for school children. This year, having more fully recovered from his stroke, he plans to read live and in person.

Last year, at the last minute, James Earl Jones recorded a public service announcement for Read Across America. This year, it will air on hundreds of radio stations beginning February 1.

Last year, children's author and illustrator Tomie dePaola donated one illustrated certificate of participation to Read Across America. This year, there are two.

Last year, only one Cat in the Hat traveled up and down the East Coast promoting Read Across America. This year, seven Cats will prowl the nation in February.

■ **Reaching a Diverse Universe:** At the Cerritos Center for Performing Arts in California, performers will read Seuss and other children's books in a bunch of different languages.

Going global, a Florida middle school has made plans to read with a South African middle school via the Internet.

The United Neighborhood Organizations of Chicago are raising money so the 7,000 Hispanic families they serve will have special celebrations.

■ **Fizz from Biz:** Last year, a few community book stores held special events. This year, Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Target are encouraging all of their stores to mark Dr. Seuss's birthday and Read Across America with reading celebrations. And Grolier, Random House, and Scholastic, Inc., will join the fun.

Last year, the *Denver Post* and perhaps a dozen other newspapers joined the celebration. This year, the Newspaper Association of America is encouraging hundreds of its members to join in.

This year, Saturn workers are inviting children to their plant to deliver a crystal-clear message: Today's assembly line jobs require good reading skills.

■ **Cry—and Try—Again:** Last year, the Navy arranged for sailors from the USS Eisenhower to read *The Cat in the Hat* to local kids. But, at the last minute, the Eisenhower had to pay a visit to Saadam Hussein. This year, perhaps Saadam will behave.

Last year, students from the Cherokee Nation arranged for a few skydivers to join their outdoor reading celebration. Heavy winds forced a cancellation. This year, the skydivers will try, try again.

Whether you're planning to jump out of a plane, eat worms, or just read one book with one child, NEA and Dr. Seuss's family salute your efforts to generate new enthusiasm for reading among America's children.

What You Can Do

Here's how you can join the party:

■ Visit the Web at www.nea.org/readacross, sign the pledge, and let NEA—and the local media—know what you're planning.

■ Recruit your friends and family for March 2 reading events.

■ Stock up on "Seuss devices at wholesale prices." For hats and other Seuss paraphernalia, go online to www.nea.org/readacross/catalogue.html.

Heroes & Zeroes

A dozen long-stems to Rosie O'Donnell to put in her deep pockets. O'Donnell's For All Kids Foundation has raised $13 million in just two years from benefits and the sale of KMart Christmas ornaments, *Kids Are Punny* books, and a Rosie doll, friend to Barbie. The foundation supports groups that help children with child care, medical, educational, and housing programs.

AP/Wide World

I Know What You Didn't Do Last Christmas: Go see that horrendous excuse for film entertainment, *The Faculty*. The alleged plot: When evil aliens take over the hearts and minds of high school teachers, their students have no choice but to kill them. You're forgiven if you'd rather get your horrors grading term papers.

"In spite of everything, I still believe people are truly good at heart." Those words will be carved into granite and placed at the nation's first memorial to Anne Frank, to be built sometime soon in Boise, Idaho. Hats off to Idaho Education Association members—led by Kathi Lamm—for seizing the moment to teach students about human rights and to encourage kids across the state to collect coins to fund Anne's statue.

No dice for The Phonics Game, a reading program that two researchers single out as the winner of their "Educational Mirage Award" for "claims too good to be true." Will the game raise kids' IQs, reading levels, and grades after 18 hours? Not likely. For more, go to www.edresearch.com.

Special delivery: NEA-Retired members gave a school bus packed with 100 boxes of school supplies and clothes to La Montana School for the Disabled in Sonora, Mexico. Roll the credits: NEA-R President Marian Conrad made the arrangements, Secretary Jean Savidge (above) helped drive the bus, and dozens of retirees contributed money and materials.

On Capitol Hill

Forget About Social Security?

Privatizers want you to believe that Social Security is broken. Hardly. It just needs a little fine tuning.

Is the Social Security system nearing bankruptcy? Can it only be saved by handing billions of your dollars over to Wall Street investors—with no guarantees?

You may be asking disturbing questions like these in the coming months as the 106th Congress takes up the hot issue of Social Security "reform."

Chances are you already hear what retired Arizona NEA member Barbara Matteson hears from her grown children. "My kids say, 'Forget about Social Security—we'll never see it,'" laments this retired Tucson teacher.

But what you probably haven't heard are the facts about Social Security's true financial health and its positive impact on kids and working families.

"I'm old enough to remember about the Depression, and how Social Security was the most successful program ever to lift people out of poverty," says Matteson, a member of NEA-Retired's Advisory Council.

You may not be old enough to remember that—or to know that:

■ **Social Security is more than just a retirement program.** Back in 1939, Social Security was changed to a "family based economic security program" that includes far more than retirement benefits.

"Social Security," Matteson stresses, "is also a life insurance policy for survivors, for the disabled, and for minors without parents—a real blessing."

■ **Low-wage workers pay proportionately more than the wealthy in Social Security taxes.** In return, they receive proportionately higher benefits—a lifesaver when a pension, 401(k) plan, or personal savings aren't available at retirement.

"Do away with Social Security now," warns Matteson, "and millions of people, mostly women, would go into poverty."

■ **Social Security is extremely well funded.** While many other countries pay retirement benefits out of general revenues, the United States operates Social Security on a "partial reserve" basis, with more money coming in than going out. Tax revenues not needed to pay benefits are invested daily in U.S. government bonds.

"Social Security was the most successful program ever to lift people out of poverty."

Arizona retired teacher Barbara Matteson

■ **Social Security won't go "broke" for a very long time,** even if you make very pessimistic assumptions about the nation's economic future. Making these pessimistic assumptions, Social Security Trust Fund trustees estimate that the program will meet all its obligations until the year 2019—when it will be necessary to begin drawing on trust fund reserves to pay benefits.

After 2029, trustees say, reserves may be depleted, but even if that occurs, annual tax revenues will still cover at least three-fourths of the program's total obligations.

■ **Social Security can be kept solvent with relatively minor repairs.** NEA economist Stan Wisniewski lays out three options that could do the job:

1) A 1 percent increase in the Social Security payroll tax deduction—now at 6.4 percent.

2) A boost in the $68,400 salary cap—above which earnings aren't taxed for Social Security.

3) Federal investment of a portion of the Social Security reserve funds in a passive index stock fund, offering higher returns than government bonds.

■ **Privatization of Social Security isn't an answer.** In the months ahead, you'll hear calls—from the same folks who support school privatization—for the creation of personal Social Security investment accounts, in which individuals assume all or part of the risk.

In such uninsured plans—lacking a *guaranteed* lifetime benefit—"a bad role of the dice could mean that your kids will be taking care of you in your old age," Wisniewski cautions. That's if you have kids who can afford it.

■ **Social Security reform affects everybody.** Many of the "reform" plans call for enrollment of new public employees in Social Security, even in pension systems where retirees aren't now covered by the federal program.

"Such a move," warns Wisniewski, "could mean insufficient revenue to support older people in those systems.

"We're all part of the same society," the economist adds. "Any breakdown of Social Security will impact 'non-covered' employees—especially when family members who aren't school employees look to them for help."

For More Information

Visit the Social Security Administration's Web site at www.ssa.gov/online and check out the "Social Security and You" teachers' kit.

Big Bucks Beckon

Right now, a virtual crusade is on to move Social Security funds into individual investment accounts—overseen by brokers, banks, mutual fund managers, or your cousin Freddie.

Whatta deal. The *Washington Post* predicts that Wall Street firms would make about $240 billion in fees during the first 12 years if Social Security were to be managed by private investors.

Some Familiar Old Friends

The same people who back school vouchers, privatization, and "paycheck protection" measures that would rob union members of a political voice are banking on the "contracting out" of the Social Security fund investment.

Topping the list is the Cato Institute, an ultraconservative think tank that's soliciting donations from Wall Street firms for a $100 million ad campaign boosting Social Security privatization.

A Hidden Benefit or Two

In all the noise about Social Security "bankruptcy" and low birth rates, you'll hear little about this nation's rising incomes, which boost Social Security tax revenues. Or the new Consumer Price Index formula, effective January 1, that will slow the rate of increase of Social Security COLA payments by some 0.2 percentage points a year.

Where NEA Stands

Among other things, NEA's Legislative Program calls for Social Security reforms that:

■ Maintain or enhance the economic security of current and future generations of contributors.

■ Provide a sound base of universal insurance protections to families.

■ Are equitable, nondiscriminatory and ensure at least the same level of economic benefit currently provided.

■ Minimize investment risk and maintain the current, low-level cost of administering Social Security.

The Bottom Line

Good teachers: Next to making sure that schools are safe, ensuring a a qualified teacher for every student is the best way to improve American education, says a new Louis Harris poll of the American public. For poll details, check www.rnt.org/tep.html.

Trusted teachers: What professionals do Americans trust most? Teachers, concludes pollster Louis Harris. Teachers have the trust of 86 percent of Americans. Trailing behind: clergy (85 percent), doctors (83), pollsters (55), and journalists (43).

Literacy lacking: Nearly a billion people—one-sixth of humanity—will enter the new century "unable to read a book or sign their names," reports UNICEF, the top United Nations agency focused on children. For more, check www.unicef.org/sowc99/.

Salaries: Teachers in Germany and Switzerland earn twice their nation's gross domestic product per capita, reports the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The U.S. teacher rate: only 1.2 times per capita GDP. For more, go to www.oecd.org.

In the States

Bad Idea Back in Bay State

A basic skills test for current teachers? 'No need, no way,' say Massachusetts NEA members.

Nobody could or should question your competence if you teach at Robin Hood School in Stoneham, Massachusetts. The quality controls are simply *that* good.

Since legislators passed the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, teachers at Robin Hood, like their colleagues across the state, have been working harder than ever.

They're meeting stiffer standards and tougher evaluation guidelines, studying for a required number of professional development "points," and toiling to meet two mega-mandates—achievement of a Master's within five years of certification and *recertification* every five years.

Of course, along with that work comes a professional reward or two.

Under the reform law, "school systems now have to devise professional development programs for staff," reports Alice Reilly, a fourth grade teacher at Robin Hood School. "For our staff, that has meant the opportunity to take more courses and get tuition reimbursement."

Moreover, the 1993 law prompted the district and the Stoneham Teachers Association to negotiate an innovative three-year "evaluation cycle." This process advances teachers in annual stages, from formal evaluation to targeted professional development to "colleague-to-colleague observation."

That last stage, says Reilly, "allows me to to go to another teacher's classroom to watch, say, a hands-on science program. Experiences like this really enhance classroom performance."

Tell that to Paul Cellucci, newly elected governor of Massachusetts.

Cellucci's campaign platform included a call to make "all current teachers pass a competency test in order to continue teaching."

Michael Quan

Fourth grade teacher Alice Reilly enjoys the contractual right to learn teaching techniques by observing in other classrooms. Reilly is a member of the Massachusetts Teachers Association's governing board.

As acting governor, Cellucci tried and failed to pass a testing bill last year. The legislation died in committee after Association members lobbied hard against it, and key legislators called it an "election-year gimmick."

Gimmick or not, current teacher testing is again on Cellucci's legislative agenda. He ignores these facts:

■ **Paper-and-pencil basic skills tests prove nothing about current teachers.** This idea was tried and discarded in both Arkansas and Texas.

"In our state, the test was the brainchild of Ross Perot, who headed up a select committee on education reform," recalls Texas State Teachers Association staffer Annette Cootes. "He was convinced that many teachers were illiterate, and we were all tested. By the second try, 98 percent passed."

Stephanie Korchek of the Texas State Board of Educator Certification reports that the state paid $4.8 million in 1985-86 to develop this exam—and got nothing to show for it but a "resentful environment, which is not what public education needs."

■ **Money wasted on such exams would be better spent on kids.** Ask Massachusetts teacher Alice Reilly what she could do with $4.8 million.

"I work in an inclusion class with 10 at-risk kids," she says. "I need support for them. My school needs more computers and more computer teachers. And we're not online!"

■ **Current teacher testing creates needless conflict.** At presstime, MTA leaders were ratcheting up a grassroots campaign against Cellucci's testing proposal—including mass meetings with legislators, postcard and letter writing campaigns, stepped-up public relations, and coalition building.

For those concerned about quality education, it's all very frustrating.

"These attacks on public education have brought teacher morale to an all-time low, and that affects the kids," says Reilly. "We could do much more for children and public education if we channeled the energy we expend on fighting into more positive activities."

For More Information

Go to the Massachusetts Teachers Association Web site at www.massteacher.org.

Ask a Teacher!
While mobilizing—like never before—against Governor Paul Cellucci's scheme to test current teachers, Massachusetts Teachers Association members are indeed thinking positively.

"Our campaign will not only defeat Cellucci's proposal, it will involve members in setting the overall direction that MTA takes on a wide number of education reform issues," pledges MTA President Stephen E. Gorrie.

MTA has already filed a new teacher mentoring bill, and "we're focusing on the need to create a safe, modern environment for teaching and learning," says MTA Communications Director Andy Linebaugh. "Throughout this campaign, our message will be, 'Ask a *teacher* how to improve schools.'"

Board of Education, Inc.
If Governor Cellucci fails to win passage of current teacher testing legislation, the powerful Massachusetts Board of Education may try testing through the regulatory route.

Board member James Peyser, executive director of the pro-voucher, pro-privatization Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, asserts that some teachers lack "even the basic competence in their field or in reading and writing."

At least three other board members are also connected to the Pioneer Institute, the group responsible for "framing" the state's charter school law, which permits management of public schools by private firms.

The state board has awarded the management contracts for two of those charter schools to Advantage Schools, Inc., which is heavily funded by Fidelity Ventures, an arm of the mutual fund giant Fidelity Investments.

Kid-friendly Fidelity.

"This is not a charitable activity," Fidelity Vice President Neal Yanofsky reminded the *Boston Globe*. "It is an area where we may be able to do some good, but the underlying drive is investment opportunity."

Ads in class: A host of public interest groups are asking Congress to hold hearings on Channel One, the controversial TV show that pipes advertising for gum, movies, sneakers, and other products targeted at teens into 12,000 schools in 47 states.

Courses: Some 45 percent of Black students are now taking the high school core curriculum—four years of English, three each of social studies, science, and math—up from 12 percent in 1982. For more on the Web, check www.ctredpol.org/policypapers.html#issues.

Behind bars: Since 1987, states have upped their prison budgets by 30 percent—and lowered spending for higher education by 18 percent. In New York, college tuition rose 30 percent in 1995, the first year the state's prison budget topped outlays for colleges.

No respect: Of the 20 job categories estimated to grow the fastest by 2005, child care work is the lowest-paying. Child care workers average $3,000 less than cashiers, the next lowest-paying high-growth job. For more, go to www.natprior.org.

At the Bargaining Table

A Strike for Basic Dignity

You may have been talking turkey last Thanksgiving, but the state-appointed administrators who run New Jersey's largest school district were not.

They refused to budge on the Jersey City Education Association's proposals for a fair, career-building teacher evaluation procedure.

Feelings about the old evaluation process were raw. "Teachers were being evaluated by as many as three supervisors in a day, up to 20 times a year by different people, and even on the first day of school!" says JCEA President Tom Favia.

Jersey City educators had other burning concerns, including the lack of professional development opportunities. But punitive evaluating was the issue that forced the 3,500 educators on strike for a week.

And what a motivator indignity can be. JCEA's members—teachers, teachers' aides, and non-instructional supervisors—stayed solid in the face of a $100,000-per-day fine against their union and threats of a mass firing.

Their strike peaked with a nine-block-long march to the board of education offices.

"We were 3,500 strong, singing songs of union solidarity and being applauded by community members," says JCEA activist Gerry Mattaliano. "We passed apartment buildings that had hand-painted sheets of support hanging from windows. City workers, store owners, and so many others raised their fists and cheered us on!"

That unity—plus support from other NEA affiliates and even other unions—produced a contract that:

- Establishes a new evaluation procedure requiring timely feedback, corrective recommendations, and follow-up evaluation by the *same* supervisor.
- Puts newly organized teaching assistants on a salary guide and provides them contractual benefits.
- Provides a raise equal to that in other state-run districts—12.3 percent over three years.
- Protects all health benefits.

The Bonus of Working Together

In Columbus, Ohio, NEA members use a contract provision to boost student achievement.

A "gainsharing" agreement negotiated recently by the 5,000-member Columbus (Ohio) Education Association creates the opportunity for breaking down isolation among faculty, boosting student achievement, and adding to educators' bank accounts.

Here's how it works:

- Teachers, principals, and parents or members of the community at each of the district's 146 buildings form gainsharing committees.
- The committees set measurable goals for student achievement and create action plans for reaching them.
- Once an action plan is ratified by two-thirds of the school staff, initialed by the Association's senior faculty rep, and approved by the joint CEA/School Board Gainsharing Committee, educators get to work.
- If a school's goals are met by the end of the year, each staffer gets a $500 bonus.

This isn't some form of merit pay or stipend that pits employee against employee, say Columbus educators.

"Our staff isn't motivated by the extra money, although we're glad to accept it," says Karen Schwab, faculty rep at the Ft. Hayes Metropolitan Education Center, a combination alternative high school for arts and academics and career center.

Instead, the Ft. Hayes staffers are using gainsharing as the impetus to help them set achievement goals and meet urban challenges.

Among the goals they've set for this year are increased attendance, higher graduation rates, and a boost in ninth-graders' scores on Ohio's student proficiency test.

The school already has a lot going for it. Staffers picks 1,200 students by lottery and expose them to a unique environment—including a 100-year-old campus, an art gallery with ever-changing exhibits, and lots of cross-curricular classwork.

Cliff Jette

A library media specialist, Karen Schwab works at a high school in Columbus where all faculty members mentor five freshmen.

Since the gainsharing agreement, Schwab says, "everybody's making a concerted effort to prepare students for the proficiency test—without losing sight of the curriculum or being driven by the test."

New instructional strategies are already in place.

Once a week, Ft. Hayes's in-house bulletin publishes a sample state test math problem, for discussion in first-period classes.

"That gets even English and art students thinking about math," notes Schwab.

And staffers have initiated a new program that assigns each faculty member to five freshmen for regular meetings and mentoring.

"I invited my five kids to a pizza party to talk about their grade cards," reports Schwab, a library media specialist. "They signed a pact spelling out how they would raise their grades. It makes a difference when every ninth grader has an adult to lean on."

At the end of the year, promises CEA President John Grossman, the Association will use its newspaper as a clearinghouse for these and other staff-generated strategies.

"Our actions," Grossman says, "are based on the premise that teaching staffs can accomplish great things with students when they unite in a common effort."

The gainsharing agreement adds to CEA's reputation as a leader in the New Unionism movement that ties collective teacher action to student achievement.

In the 1980s, CEA negotiated a peer assistance and review program that became a model for districts working to boost teacher quality (see *NEA Today*, November 1997).

Still, advances always come with cautionary notes.

"There's a definite concern that gainsharing not turn into a merit pay concept," says Schwab. "We don't want to be pitted against the suburbs that surround Columbus," she stresses, "and I don't want my pay raise tied to performance in the future."

That's not likely to happen in Columbus, Ohio.

The $500 gainsharing bonus is "not in lieu of raises on our salary schedule," says John Grossman.

"In fact," he adds, "this provision is just part of a three-year contract—with annual raises of 2.5 percent, 3 percent, and 3 percent—that has kept Columbus on the list of Ohio's five—out of a total of 710—best paid districts."

For More Information

Visit the Columbus Education Association Web site at www.ceaohio.org and a Ft. Hayes conference site at www.network98.com.

The Bottom Line

Defending kids: Over two-thirds of social workers trying to protect children from abuse and neglect have been victimized by on-the-job violence and threats, says a new report from AFSCME, the AFL-CIO union that represents child welfare workers.

Low-income Americans: Voters in Washington State last November enacted the nation's most far-sighted minimum wage law. The new statute indexes the state minimum wage—which is slated to rise to $6.50 an hour in 2000—to inflation after next year.

Shallow boom: The typical married-couple family worked 247 more hours in 1996 than in 1989 just to maintain the same level of purchasing power. So notes the Economic Policy Institute's *State of Working America*. For more, go to www.epinet.org.

Fine arts: About one in five American schools serving eighth graders don't offer music or art classes at least once a week. The U.S. Department of Education reports that 9 percent of schools offer no music instruction, and 17 percent offer no visual arts.

At the Local Level

They Started With Nothing

In a poor corner of Louisiana, support staff get a $1,000 raise. For some, that's two months' pay.

Rural East Carroll Parish, Louisiana, isn't a place to linger if you want a non-farm job, a living wage, or a cheaper alternative to the only two supermarkets within 422 square miles—Jong's Number One and Jong's Number Two.

Lots of folks from East Carroll, one of the nation's poorest counties, travel to neighboring Arkansas or Mississippi to scrape out a living. For those who stay closer to home, there are only two major employers, the Boat Commission and the public schools.

Virginia Green, school bus driver

"It's sad, really sad," says school bus driver Virginia Green. "A lot of people, Black and white, have no jobs, and young people have no place to go."

But for all their hard times, parish taxpayers recently approved a 5.58 mill property tax renewal for school maintenance and a one-cent sales tax for school employee raises.

The sales tax levy, passed by a 2-1 margin, will mean a minimum $1,000 across-the-board raise in 1999 for *every* school employee—from superintendent to secretary.

■ **Behind this amazing feat lies** a superintendent sensitive to the wages of educational support personnel, and an ESP workforce fed up with always getting lower raises than teachers.

Seeing little financial help from the state, Superintendent Marrage Facen proposed a penny sales tax linked to an across-the-board raise.

"He gave us the idea," says NEA member and ESP spokesperson Virginia Green, "and we ran with it."

Some 70 ESP members of the East Carroll Parish Association of Educators waged a dawn-to-dusk outreach campaign in the month before the election.

All ESP campaigners "worked" their own streets for votes, telling friends and relatives how little they earn.

"After taxes, I clear $740 a month, while some cooks clear just $500," reveals Green. "People said they didn't know that. They thought we were making good money."

Using their own stories, East Carroll Parish ESP found a winning message. And they drove it home with posters, fliers, and a get-out-the-vote drive that included an Election Day barbecue and free rides to the polls.

■ **Behind these amazing ESP members lies** a talent for self-organization that emerged in 1996, when they formed a finance committee to help pay their way to a state capitol rally for a school employee raise.

"That was the first time East Carroll Parish ESP ever did anything about getting a raise," says Willie Mae Stewart, a special needs teacher assistant at Lake Providence High School.

After the 1996 rally, UniServ Director Eva Dyann Wilson met East Carroll ESP members monthly after sundown, when many had finished with farm chores, for training on everything from grievance handling to political action.

Today, all that training has produced an ESP group that signs up new members, handles its own grievances, and displays a "high level of self-confidence—they're willing to travel anywhere for the Louisiana Association of Educators," Wilson notes.

"Our ESP club raised its dues in case we need to travel somewhere," says Virginia Green. "If we get no support from our superintendent, we just get in our cars and go."

Wilson Matthews, school bus driver

The secret to staying so focused? "Your number one priority must be a positive attitude," advises Willie Mae Stewart, an ESP activist. "You also need to know what you want to achieve and get everyone in agreement."

Maybe this can-do attitude can help improve conditions for other area residents. "We're trying to make it work, says Green, who urges NEA members to "think about us down here, investigate us. We need help."

Photographs by Tom Morris

A raise means a lot to NEA members like Earnest Toston, a school cook in one of the poorest counties in America.

For More Information

Call UniServ Director Eva Dyann Wilson at 318/387-0536. For more ESP news, go to NEA Today*'s Web site at www.nea.org/neatoday and scroll down to "Extra! Extra!"*

Minnesotans Go Public
In Minnesota, members of the White Bear Lake Teachers Association are talking to individuals and community groups about what's happening in public schools today.

"It's best to go to comfortable groups first," explains local President John Raphael, "like PTAs, neighborhood in-house parties, or civic groups that strongly support public education.

"Sometimes," he adds, "teachers have to be reminded that they are professional communicators."

Hard Work in Alabama
Members of the Birmingham Education Association and Birmingham ESP Association recently volunteered at a school clean-up day sponsored by a local TV station, the city, and the school district.

This was the first of BEA's "Project Public Image" events this year. Also on tap: a new teacher mentoring program, intergenerational tutoring involving retired BEA members, and a monthly public forum on education issues.

Justice in South Dakota
In contract bargaining for the 1995-96 school year, members of the Lead-Deadwood (South Dakota) Education Association were stuck with several board-imposed provisions, including an inferior health plan and salaries *below* the district's last best offer.

In response to an unfair labor practice charge filed by LDEA, the South Dakota Department of Labor has forced the district to pay back wages, reimburse employees for costs resulting from health insurance changes, and reimburse Association bargaining team members who had to use personal leave to prepare for factfinding.

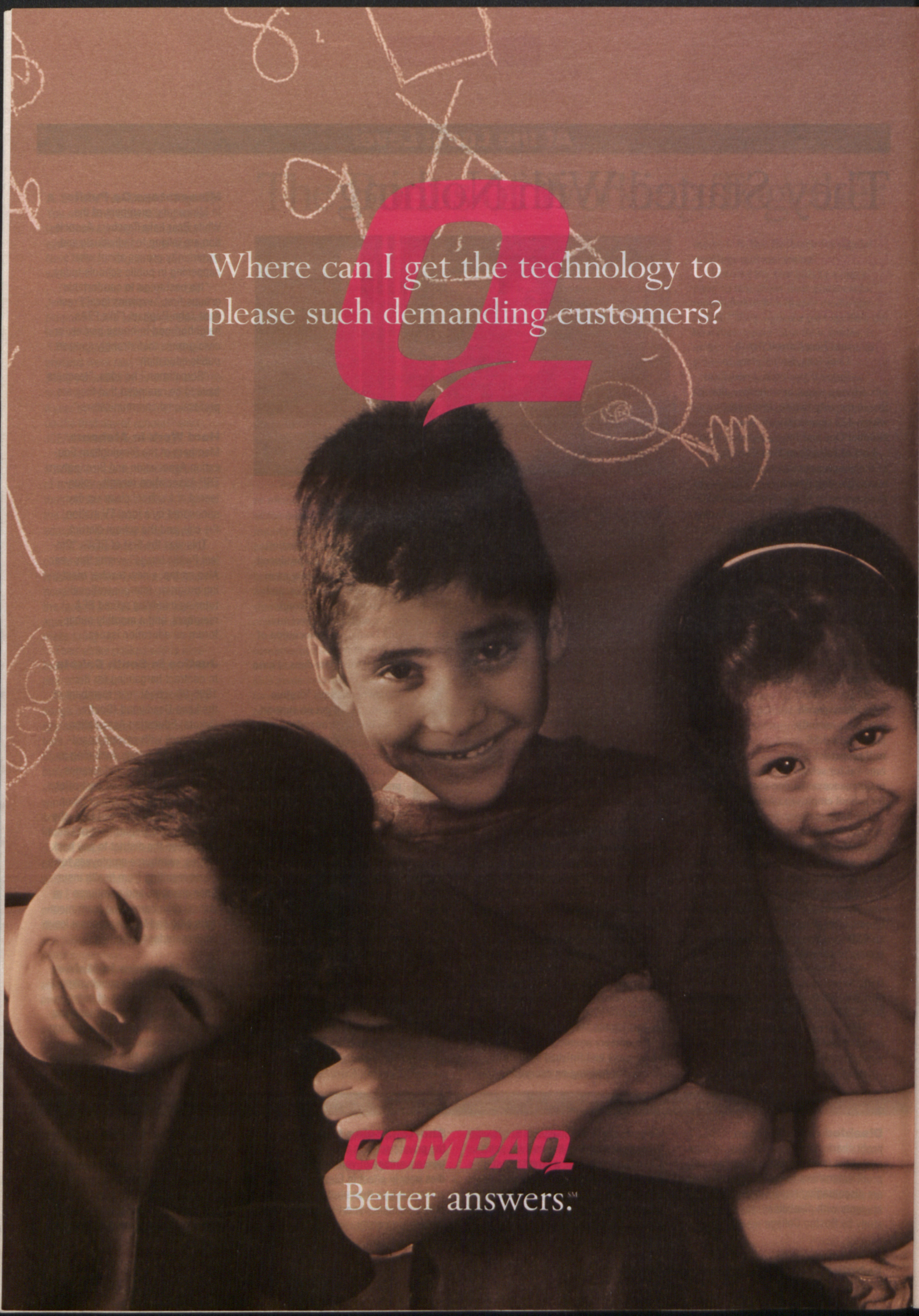
New Members in Maine
In the Kennebunk-Kennebunkport area, two new groups of secretaries and custodial/maintenance personnel have joined Association bargaining units. That's 50 new—and welcome—NEA members.

Disabled not welcome: For-profit charter schools in Massachusetts, one of the few states that allow for-profit enterprises to operate charters, are discouraging registrations from students with disabilities, says a new study by Boston College researchers.

Vouchers: Public schools in Milwaukee may find themselves short $30 million this year, a direct result of the district's subsidies for private school tuition. For details, check the Web at www.pfaw.org/issues/education/milwaukee.standup.shtml.

Shortchanging kids: Students in the private schools that popped up to take advantage of voucher tuition subsidies now in effect in Cleveland are achieving less than students in the city's public schools, report researchers from Indiana University.

Unqualified teachers: Charter schools in North Carolina, says the state's first charter school evaluation, are hiring one unlicensed teacher for every licensed teacher hired. By law, 75 percent of the teachers in each charter elementary must be licensed.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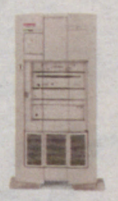

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"Children need to have a sense of self-worth and belonging in order to learn," says Massachusetts teacher Carol Stahl. She imparts that sense of belonging to her students who speak Cape Verde Creole, a non-standardized, non-written language. For details, see Innovators, page 17.

Michael Quan

Innovators

Whale of a **Success**

Innovator:
Wyland

Job:
Artist, environmentalist, and founder of the nonprofit Wyland Foundation

Bright Idea:
Wyland—known for his mega-sized murals called "Whaling Walls"—issued the Wyland Ocean Challenge last year to schools nationwide to increase awareness of the oceans.

The challenge features lesson plans (K-6 or 7-12) developed with the Orange County Marine Institute. Students write songs, poems, or essays on marine life. Some go on to work on more "challenging" art projects, culminating in a team ocean mural.

"These kids become passionate and committed about cleaning up the ocean," says Wyland. "I tell them it takes one person to make a difference—be that person!"

Impact:
To date, 15,000 students have been inspired to create 100,000 ocean murals—and many more have learned to protect the oceans, says Wyland.

For More:
Contact the Wyland Foundation at P.O. Box 1839, Laguna Beach, CA 92651, 800/777-0039, or visit the Web at www.wylandfoundation.org.

Minding **Morals**

Building Character in Schools: Practical Ways To Bring Moral Instruction to Life *by Kevin Ryan and Karen Bohlin. Jossey-Bass, 270 pp., $25.*

"The majority of teachers enter the profession with the goal of devoting their life to the betterment of the young. To some, [that] means learning the skills of literacy or science. . . . Most would-be teachers, however, have the more general goal of helping children become better human beings—what we would call people of character.

In a recent study by Alice Lanckton of middle school history and social studies teachers, fully one-third of 30 respondents thought of character education as their priority in teaching, but not one of them could remember hearing anything in their undergraduate teacher education courses about moral, character, or value education.

Character education, once a mainstay of teacher education, has clearly slipped into the null curriculum at our schools of education."

New Angle on **Early Geometry**

Innovator:
Douglas Clements

Job:
Professor of mathematics and computer education, State University of New York at Buffalo

Bright Idea:
Don't wait till high school to teach angles and trapezoids. Clements believes that students can learn more geometry at an earlier age.

"Kids can do mathematical things from their first year—way earlier than we thought," says Clements. "To do active teaching, it's essential to know how kids think, what strategies they use."

The National Science Foundation tapped Clements to find out just that, awarding him a grant to co-develop a K-5 math curriculum, *Investigations in Number, Data, and Space* (Dale Seymour Publications, $35), while researching the teaching and learning of geometry in grades K-5.

"In the past," notes Clements, "elementary teachers would do a cute geometry activity, and all the kids learned was to name shapes. With these two projects, we tried to develop activities that would enrich what geometry can be at grades K-5 and move children through levels of geometric thinking."

At the first level—visual—children can identify shapes. At the second level—descriptive-analytic—they can explain why a certain shape is, say, a rectangle. At the third level—abstract—students can make inferences and see the properties have implications.

Fourth/fifth grade activities to enhance this kind of learning include making a toy from interconnected tubes and then drawing a diagram of the toy or predicting how many cubes it will take to fill a box.

Clements has co-developed *Turtle Math* (LCSI, $69), computer software that complements this curriculum.

"It's exciting to see kids arguing about shapes," says Clements. "When the computers are put away, they consolidate their knowledge and present different ideas. This is the precursor to building up proofs and theorems."

Impact:
Textbook publishers and state education departments are modifying math guidelines based on Clements's work.

For More:
Contact Clements at SUNY at Buffalo, Department of Learning and Instruction, 505 Baldy Hall, Buffalo, NY 14260, 716/645-3158, or send E-mail to Clements@acsu.buffalo.edu.

Mike Groll

June McMahon

Linda Tubach

Photos by Bob Riha, Jr.

Striking a Chord: Labor Lessons

UCLA's Center for Labor Research and Education will sponsor its 7th annual Collective Bargaining Institute for Los Angeles high school students in May.

The day-long simulation, coordinated by several unions and held at the United Teachers of Los Angeles headquarters, brings together 100 area students and their teachers. Union negotiators volunteer as coaches, advising students as they work through their case study, enter into bargaining, and strive to reach agreement.

An outgrowth of the Institute is the Collective Bargaining Education Project, funded in part by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. Two full-time release teachers visit individual classrooms on behalf of the project to demonstrate curriculum on labor issues.

June McMahon, Institute coordinator, and Linda Tubach, who co-directs the education project, recently spoke with NEA Today.

How much do your students know about unions or labor movement history?

McMahon: Most have no background in these topics unless their parents are labor activists. It's an area of their education that's been ignored. They may have been taught the importance of being on time or other job-related skills, but we're educating them about their rights in the workplace.

We know there are not a lot of union jobs out there. But we tell them it's their legal right to organize, join a union, and engage in collective bargaining. It's knowledge they can use for the rest of their lives.

How do students react to the simulation technique?

Tubach: The kids love it. They're working-class kids, and the issues connect to their own lives. Most are seniors, and many are already working. The pedagogy engages them in a deep way. Since they're the decision-makers, solving real-world problems, they retain what they've learned.

We deal with issues like wages, racism, and abuse by employers. We see kids participate who've never participated before. There's no room for bystanders. It's a great way for them to express leadership qualities.

I've even had former students become labor organizers.

Why do you promote the labor curriculum through individual demonstrations?

Tubach: Most teachers don't plunge into a complicated lesson without seeing it demonstrated. Many are fairly traditional and haven't used simulations before. We know from research that the best training for teachers is on-the-job training.

What does the future hold for your project?

Tubach: This is the most fun I've ever had as a teacher.

We're looking for more grant money to continue our work. Our time is really booked, and we've had a steady stream of interest from educators around the country.

Our curriculum materials on collective bargaining, history-making strikes, union organizing, and workplace rights are available to all educators, and we're happy to talk to teachers about implementation.

Contact McMahon at mcmahon@ucla.com for a free kit on setting up a collective bargaining institute. For details on the labor issues curriculum—and for a workplace simulation called "The Yummy Pizza Co.," developed by the California Teachers Association for grades 3-5—contact Tubach at the Collective Bargaining Education Project, UTLA, 3303 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 328, Los Angeles, CA 90010, 213/386-3144.

Michael Quan

Voice for Cape Verde

Innovator:
Carol Stahl

Job:
Third grade teacher in transitional bilingual education, Gilmore School, Brockton, Massachusetts

Bright Idea:
Stahl grew up speaking English with her parents and Cape Verde Creole with her grandmother—until the first grade, when a Portuguese student told her that Creole was "not a real language."

"I was devastated," says Stahl. "From that day on, I didn't speak Creole. And I lost that part of my life."

At the Gilmore School, almost half the students are immigrants from Cape Verde, an island nation and former Portuguese colony off the west coast of Africa. Many speak only Cape Verde Creole, a non-standardized, non-written language.

Stahl is working to make sure these students can function and compete in English while maintaining respect for their Cape Verde heritage.

Stahl uses her own handmade materials to allow the Cape Verdian children to see simple phrases and words written both in Creole and English—a big challenge, since she has to generate all the written materials for her classroom.

"When children see their language in print, they have a sense that it's important," says Stahl. "They gain an understanding of written language.

"When they develop that in their first language," she adds, "they can transfer those skills and learn English quickly."

Impact:
The Cape Verdian community is gaining a stronger voice. Adults now work in the community as translators, and one guidance counselor at the Gilmore School is Cape Verdian.

For More:
Contact Carol Stahl at 63 Vesey St., Brockton, MA 02401 or by E-mail at cstahl@massed.net.

Inspiring Colleagues

"We are all unique," writes school psychologist Robert A. Sullo, "but one thing most of us share is a lack of patience with colleagues who begin to preach to us after they have had a learning experience that was particularly meaningful to them.

"The preacher who gives us unsolicited advice about how to improve our classrooms and schools has forgotten some important concepts:

- Everyone is doing the best they can.
- All behavior is purposeful.
- And what my colleagues are doing makes good sense to them even if I believe I have learned a better way to do things.

"Unsolicited advice is the thinly disguised twin of criticism, the most destructive behavior we can use with others."

Source: "Inspiring Quality in Your School: Inspiring Your Colleagues," by Robert A. Sullo, Teaching and Change, Spring-Summer 1998. Subscription info: www.corwinpress.com.

Good Stuff

Inspiring Tranquility
Too overwhelmed to read a dry stress management book? Then *Inspiring Tranquility: Stress Management and Learning Styles in the Inclusive Classroom* may be for you. The authors—a teacher and a physical therapist—have taken new research on how the brain works and created strategies to help educators and students initiate a "relaxation response" in stressful classroom situations. 112 pp., $10.95 for NEA members from the NEA Professional Library. Call 800/229-4200 and refer to stock #2592-6-00-FG.

Summer Seminars
The National Endowment for the Humanities will offer seminars and institutes for K-12 teachers during the summer of 1999. Topics include comparative African literature, the poetry of modern America, studies of epic literature, the Arab world and the West, the use of maps as texts to study world history, and more. Locations will range from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival to Harvard University to Senegal. Applications are due by March 1. For more information and application forms, visit the Web at www.neh.gov/html/awards/seminar1.html.

Women of Hope
March is National Women's Month, and the *International Women of Hope* study guide and poster series commemorate 12 great contemporary figures, from Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi to Peace Bikunda, who created a clinic to treat women and children who have survived the killings in Rwanda. $59.95 per poster set, $12.95 for the study guide, plus 10 percent s&h from Bread & Roses, the cultural arm of the Service Employees International Union. To order, call 800/666-1728.

Curtain Call
Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* is the latest release in a video series of international stage productions of great works, including *Frankenstein*, *Cyrano*, and *Pinocchio*. Each comes with a study guide examining the historical and theatrical aspects of the play and production. $27 plus $3.95 s&h from Globalstage, 888/324-5623, or on the Web at www.globalstage.net.

You know you have a problem when . . .

"A student refuses to complete an exam even though he knows the answers, because he doesn't care if he flunks."

Myrna Thurnher, ninth grade learning disabled teacher, Woodbridge, Virginia

Dilemma

Please, Just One More Time

What do you do when a student repeatedly asks to make up work?

I have adopted the policy that I work for the parents of my students. So I do not accept late work unless the student's parent calls me to tell me to accept the work. No notes!

Parents call and ask for the child to be allowed to make up work because —and start to give me reasons. I tell them that they make the decisions for their child in my class and that I will do whatever it is that they want.

Parents are always appreciative for the opportunity to talk, and they are almost always reasonable, because I have given them control.

In 27 years of teaching, I have had only one parent who kept calling to tell me to accept late work. After the sixth time, she asked why she had to keep calling me. I simply answered, "You don't have to."

She got the point, and the student did, too.

John "Jay" Matheson
High school science teacher
Colorado Springs, Colorado

One solution I used was to give the student a voucher for three late work assignments. After that, the student would have to have a conference with a parent or guardian to get more.

Fred Tauzell
Retired elementary teacher
Fifty Lakes, Minnesota

I have found that it's very difficult to schedule make-up labs for students. So during the first few days of each school year, my students look through a stack of newspapers and clip articles dealing with a science issue—medicine, technology, environmental issues. After I check the articles, the students place them in separate envelopes.

When students miss a lab assignment, they select an envelope and

write an opinion essay about the article. It may not involve lab material missed, but the assignment covers reading and writing skills that would've been obtained from the lab.

Rob Beckwith
High school science teacher
Elkins, West Virginia

Praise them! Students should always be allowed opportunities to achieve through schoolwork. Of course, deadlines are important, so in my class students earn "mercy make-up points." These points equal half of what students would earn if they'd met the deadline.

Students realize that half of the points are better than none and are grateful for the opportunity. And I'm grateful that they took yet another opportunity to learn.

Michelle Crisman
High school language arts teacher
Springfield, Oregon

Make-up work is the student's responsibility. I keep a large calendar posted on my classroom wall, and each day's assignment is posted there. When students return, they refer to the calendar to get missed assignments. If assignments are posted at the beginning of the week, students may take their assignments with them when they know about absences in advance.

Sandra Butcher
Ninth grade coordinated science teacher
Logan, West Virginia

Though a reduction in responsibility and discipline exists, I give the make-up work. District and school policy require that students must maintain a 2.0 grade point average to advance. So at least the constant makers-up create an opportunity to learn concepts that they assuredly found incomprehensible before.

These students understand that the make-up work cannot elevate their scores by more than two grades.

Joyce Taylor Walker
Seventh and eighth grade communications skills instruction
Longwood, Florida

If the student is in grades K-6, contact the parents. Make them aware of the problem and seek their help.

For students in grades 7-12, I've found that if you allow them to make up work before or after school, they stop asking to make up work. That's their time, and they don't want to spend it in school.

Michael Joy
High school drafting and computer-aided drafting teacher
Camden, New Jersey

Got an Answer?

What's your most effective technique to keep students' minds from wandering?

Send your answer by regular mail, Fax 202/822-7206, or E-mail to dilemma 2@neatoday.nea.org. Please include your job title and grade level, if applicable.

Published respondents will receive a bright *NEA Today* mug!

Strategies

You know you've been successful when . . .

"Middle school students start bragging about each other's good grades—instead of responding with insults like 'nerd.'"

Bob Parsons, eighth grade special ed teacher, Bethany Beach, Delaware

Delight

Making the Right Decision

Long Beach students are learning more because educators are helping the district call the shots.

California's Long Beach Unified School District has joined the nation in focusing on student achievement. What makes this district unique is that teachers play a major role in deciding the best way for students to reach their academic goals.

One result: an end to social promotion. Third graders who don't read at grade level have been required to participate in a summer reading program. And eighth graders with two failures must spend a year in a special public prep school before they get a taste of high school.

"It's a rude awakening for some," says Julie Danks, a reading and writing teacher at Marshall Middle School.

But students haven't been left stranded. "We've developed a strong tutorial program for our eighth graders," notes Danks. "We want them to graduate with dignity."

Nine years ago, as part of a system-wide reorganization, the school district and the 4,200-member Teachers Association of Long Beach formed a partnership that put shared decision-making center stage.

As the collaboration has blossomed, so has student achievement. Test scores are improving throughout the district, and the dropout rate is declining.

The collaboration has grown to include the handling of the district's dollars. Control of—and responsibility for—much of the budget reaches down to the school level.

There, decision-making teams that include educators, parents, administrators, and community representatives tackle tasks ranging from allocating funds to send teachers to conferences to requisitioning a water fountain for students in portable classrooms.

"We all have a strong desire for kids to do well academically," says Danks. "A partnership involves changes, and teachers need to be flexible. Now we have input—and can say, if we need to, 'This just isn't working for us.'"

For some decisions, such as switching to a year-round schedule, the entire faculty gets to vote. In most other cases, "Teachers need to trust those of us they voted in," says Danks, an elected member of Marshall's shared decision-making team.

All meetings are open, with team members serving for two years.

At Marshall, teachers participate in selecting everything from reading material to computers. And the decisions can be tough.

"You have to be knowledgeable about what's important to your school," says Danks.

Though the process can be time-consuming, Danks finds it far preferable to the time when the district's attitude was: "Here are the books—this is what you do."

"We know our students, and what books they'll enjoy," says Danks. "Now we get to buy books the kids are requesting the most. And I can pick the books that mean something to me—ones that I'll love to read to them."

"When teachers feel they have the authority to make decisions, they buy into the whole process," says Association President Pat Williams. "They have ownership of it."

"We've made strides, though sometimes it's been painful," says Danks, a 25-year teaching veteran. "Shared decision-making is not without fault. But it sure is a lot better than the way things used to be."

Bob Riha, Jr.

"Teachers do much better work when we feel we have a voice," says Julie Danks, a middle school teacher in Long Beach, California, who shares in district decisions.

For More Information

The Teachers Association of Long Beach has developed The Shared Decision-Making Handbook, *detailing its collaboration with the school district. For a free copy, contact the Association at 562/426-6433.*

Idea Exchange

Quick Technology Tips

■ We have a student of the week in my third grade classroom. I take that student's picture with a digital camera and make it my computer's wallpaper for the week.

I also insert the photo into my weekly newsletter and tell a little bit about the student.

The boys and girls can't wait until they are chosen and can see their picture on the computer. And the photos in the newsletter give parents a chance to get to know the other students in the class.

Kris Malloy
Parkston, South Dakota

■ In my computer classes, I have two plastic cups on each computer—one red, the other blue. The two cups sit upside down, one inside the other.

When the blue cup is on top, it means "Everything is cool." When students have questions, they quietly reach up and put the red cup on top.

This allows the student to continue working on the problem—they don't have to keep their hand in the air or call my name.

Cheryl Burk
Wykoff, Minnesota

■ Students enter today's computer classes with varying skill levels when it comes to keyboarding. One way to easily assess each student's knowledge is to give them a sheet of paper with a blank keyboard printed on it and ask them to fill in the keys.

My newly enrolled business technology students quickly recognize the importance of keyboarding and have a focal point for training.

Artemis Alex
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Share Your Ideas

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Inside Scoop

Facts, Not Fads, on Schoolwide Reform

Educators have long clamored for a reliable, complete, and easy-to-use reference that pulls together information on "whole-school," "comprehensive," or "schoolwide" reform programs.

NEA has co-sponsored a new report, An Educators' Guide to Schoolwide Reform, *that provides just that resource.*

To produce the guide, NEA collaborated with the American Federation of Teachers, the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

What does the guide do?

The guide answers three questions NEA members are asking about the most widely available schoolwide reform approaches:

- Which of the approaches has a track record for improving student achievement?
- What kinds of support can schools and districts expect from the developers as they implement these programs?
- What does it cost to adopt one of these schoolwide reform approaches?

What's in the guide?

The guide first provides a ratings snapshot of 25 approaches (listed in chart at right) in a single table that's similar to comparisons readers find in *Consumer Reports* magazine.

The ratings, compiled by the American Institutes for Research, are based on a review of studies, articles, books, and other published material about each approach.

Additional information appears in profiles that explain the ratings each approach received, provide details on its key features, and include the name and address of its developer.

So which reform approach is "the best"?

That depends, in part, on what characteristics you're looking for.

"This guide is about separating real solutions—or at least programs with a track record for improving student achievement—from solutions that *might* work," says Marcie Dianda of NEA's Teaching and Learning staff.

Only three of the approaches examined—Direct Instruction, High Schools That Work, and Success for All—provide strong evidence that they positively impact student achievement.

For many of the approaches, surprisingly, there's little evidence one way or another on whether they help students achieve. Some approaches are new and haven't yet conducted studies to establish a track record. Others haven't done so even though they've been used by schools for years.

Why were these approaches, and not others, reviewed?

Seventeen of the 25 approaches are in the guide because they're mentioned by name in the federal law that created the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program.

This federal program provides $150 million per year, most of which is awarded to schools to help them with the start-up costs of adopting approaches like the ones reviewed in the guide.

The other eight reform approaches are included because they're used in many districts, they've been promoted as a means of improving student achievement in low-performing schools, they've obtained national visibility in the education and popular press, and there is at least some research evidence about their effects on students.

Why focus on "schoolwide" reform?

Schoolwide reform is a relatively new and increasingly popular school improvement strategy, especially for low-performing, high-poverty schools.

In 1994, Congress said schools with a student poverty rate of at least 50 percent could use Title I funds to improve the entire school.

As a result, thousands of schools across the country are considering schoolwide reform seriously. Unfortunately, it is difficult for school employees to obtain accurate, objective information that can help them decide whether schoolwide reform is right for them.

What does this mean to an individual teacher looking for real solutions?

"Public education is under such pressure to improve, and some decision-makers—legislators, for example—seem unwilling to look at the root causes of our problems," says Susie Olesen, a special ed teacher for grades 4-6 at Greenfield Elementary in Iowa who reviewed a draft of the *Educators' Guide* for NEA.

"This pressure causes real stress on the system, and when we hear about a miracle cure, communities are sometimes willing to jump off the edge," Olesen observes.

"Before we rush into something, we need to have some sense of its efficacy," she says. "I think this guidebook provides that."

Says Cathy Cerveny, a National Board-certified teacher at Logan Elementary in Baltimore, Maryland, who also reviewed the guide: "As a teacher mentor in a school with a significant at-risk population, I wanted to be aware of what programs might meet the needs of our students.

"Several programs that had received publicity in local counties as being 'the new thing' really had no data to support their adoption at this time," she notes. "I realized that I had to be more cautious about touting programs until more information is available.

"This *Educators' Guide* explains each reform approach and what data have been collected to substantiate any claims of success," Cerveny says.

Any caveats?

Schools can improve their performance in a variety of ways, not just with the 25 schoolwide approaches reviewed in the guide.

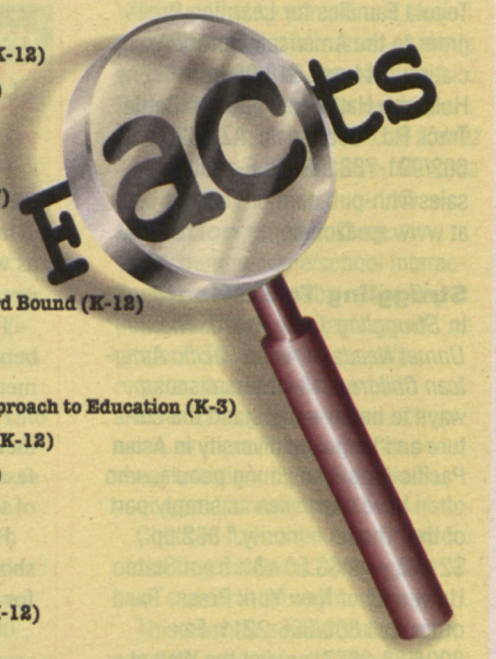
This report is a starting point. It's not intended to give educators all the information they need when deciding whether a specific school should adopt any of the approaches reviewed. Local policymakers, educators, parents, and community members need to take their own research further to make that decision.

A Consumer's Report for Educators

An Educators' Guide to Schoolwide Reform examines these 25 programs to see which have the best track records for improving student achievement and how much they cost to implement.

- **Accelerated Schools Project (K-8)**
- **America's Choice School Design (K-12)**
- **ATLAS Communities (preK-12)**
- **Audrey Cohen College: Purpose-Centered Education (K-12)**
- **Basic School Network**
- **Coalition of Essential Schools (K-12)**
- **Community for Learning (K-12)**
- **Co-NECT Schools (K-12)**
- **Core Knowledge (K-8)**
- **Different Ways of Knowing (K-7)**
- **Direct Instruction (K-6)**
- **Edison Project (K-12)**
- **Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (K-12)**
- **Foxfire Fund (K-12)**
- **High Schools That Work (9-12)**
- **High/Scope Primary Grades Approach to Education (K-3)**
- **League of Professional Schools (K-12)**
- **Modern Red Schoolhouse (K-12)**
- **Onward to Excellence (K-12)**
- **Paideia (K-12)**
- **Roots & Wings (preK-6)**
- **School Development Program (K-12)**
- **Success for All (preK-12)**
- **Talent Development High School With Career Academies (9-12)**
- **Urban Learning Centers (preK-12)**

(●) Indicates approaches named in the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program



For More Information

For a copy of *An Educators' Guide to Schoolwide Reform*, visit the NEA Web site at www.nea.org in February.

NEA will also be providing copies of the guide to each NEA state affiliate and every UniServ director. Check your local or state Association office for a copy.

Good Stuff

Meeting Goals 2000
In *Promising Practices: How Communities Across America Are Learning To Meet National Education Goals 2000*, University of Tennessee professors Ernest Brewer and Connie Hollingsworth reveal America's response at the grassroots level to the challenge of meeting Goals 2000. The book also provides an extensive section listing contact information for every resource mentioned in the book, from the Toyota Families for Learning Program to the American Library Association. 244 pp., $18.95 from Holcomb Hathaway, 6207 N. Cattle Track Rd., Scottsdale, AZ 85250, 602/991-7881. Send E-mail to sales@hh-pub.com or visit the Web at www.amazon.com.

Struggling To Be Heard
In *Struggling To Be Heard: The Unmet Needs of Asian Pacific American Children*, 18 writers discuss ways to better understand the culture and language diversity in Asian Pacific American young people, who often have been seen as simply part of the "model minority." 362 pp., $21.95 plus $3.50 s&h from State University of New York Press. To order, call 800/666-2211, Fax 800/688-2877, or visit the Web at www.sunypress.edu. Use ISBN #0-7914-3840-6.

Grieving Children
Since 1983, the Dougy Center for Grieving Children has supported thousands of children, families, and educators as they share the pain and experiences caused by deaths that have hit close to home. In *Helping Children Cope with Death: A Guide for Teachers*, the Dougy Center advises teachers on how to help their students in a crisis situation. $10 plus $2 s&h from the Dougy Center, 3909 S.E. 52nd Ave., Portland, OR 97286, 503/775-5683.

A College for Everyone
In *Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools You Should Know About Even If You're Not a Straight-A Student*, education writer Loren Pope profiles colleges that welcome "average" students and in the end produce graduates who become scholars, scientists, and business successes at the same rate their Ivy League counterparts do. 272 pp., $11.95 from Penguin Books. Available in most local bookstores.

You know you have a problem when . . .
"Parents say their kids are perfect—and any difficulties must be *your* fault."
Kay Mullaney, retired teacher, Grosse Pointe, Michigan

Dilemma

Here's What Works Best

What do you do when a parent insists on a specific strategy or method?

Ted Pitts

I make sure to listen to the parent's interpretation of the method, as well as what the parent feels are the strengths of this method.

Then I explain the connections between this method and the other methods I use in my classroom.

Parents will see how the strengths of their desired technique can be manifested in the classroom using a variety of teaching methods.

Pointing out these connections also shows my knowledge of and respect for the parent's view and concerns.

Rachel Whitcomb
Music teacher/choral director
Flemington, New Jersey

First of all, faculty at my school talk to the parents and get more background about the teaching method that they are asking us to use.

We ask if there was research done to support their method or strategy. We also try to find out what kind of student population was involved, and what percentage were successful using their method.

Finally, we cooperate with the parents, try to implement the new strategy in the classroom, and see what feedback we get from the students. In this way, we hope the parents will be satisfied.

Ahmed Elgammal
Middle school bilingual teacher
Macomb Township, Michigan

I teach students with learning disabilities at the middle school level. Our staff once had a parent who did not want her daughter taught with a specific instructional strategy because it didn't suit "her style of learning."

We met with the parent as a united group of teachers and explained how teaching with different strategies helps strengthen learning by creating new paths in the brain. It also encourages students to be flexible.

We were able to maintain a good rapport with the parent, who left with a much better understanding of what we do.

Marilyn Sieckmann
Middle school special ed resource teacher
Prescott, Arizona

I believe that a parent is a child's first teacher, so I'm very accepting of parents' ideas. Many of my parents have a limited education, and I more than appreciate their interest and input.

It has happened, especially in math, that parents will feel their way is "easier." After I've listened to their suggestion, I invite the parents to sit in on a lesson where the technique is being applied. They get to see how the children respond to the method—and gain another perspective on working with the concept.

Janice Cardona
First grade bilingual teacher
Newark, New Jersey

I have taught special ed students—from severely emotionally disturbed to resource learning disabled—for many years. Too often, parents are at a loss when dealing with a learning disabled, hyperactive child who acts out in school when frustrated.

Whenever I talk with the parents, I emphasize how "we" want the best for their child—they are not alone—and that I need their help, insights, and ideas. This way, I can find out their expectations, their misconceptions of their child's abilities, and more.

Then I let them know that their child is a part of the "we" and has responsibilities, too.

Christie Kelley
Special day class teacher, primary
Stockton, California

Got a Answer?

How do you give parents bad news about their children?
Send your answer by regular mail, Fax 202/822-7206, or E-mail to dilemma 2@neatoday.nea.org. Please include your job title and grade level, if applicable.

Published respondents will receive a bright *NEA Today* mug!

Communities

You know you've been successful when . . .

"The mother of a former student writes to thank you—and to say she's voting 'yes' on the school budget."

Tom Phillips, high school physics teacher, Freehold, New Jersey

Delight

Turning Their Town Around

Students resurrect a Michigan town that now boasts a new Finnish line.

The northern Michigan village of Kaleva—15 miles from a major highway and more than two hours from a major city—was dying.

But three years ago, art teacher Deborah Crandell and Cynthia Asiala, now a retired Spanish teacher, seized upon a way to revitalize the town. They designed an award-winning service learning class at neighboring Brethren High School that's transforming Kaleva into a tourist destination.

"The community loves this project," says Asiala. "They get to see their town improving, and the kids are proud of their work."

That work, Asiala acknowledges, is "overwhelming." In just two years, 120 juniors and seniors have refurbished six historic sites in Kaleva and resurrected its 100-year-old Finnish heritage. They did it 20 students at a time, semester by semester, 80 minutes a day, four days a week, with the help of dozens of community mentors.

Funded by a federal "learn and serve" grant, the project came to life in 1996, with students researching Kaleva's history and culture, recording the oral histories of 16 senior citizens, and conducting a needs assessment of 100 households.

This survey revealed what the ultimate mission should be: Bring economic development and tourism to their town by preserving historic buildings and reviving the Finnish heritage.

With permission from the village council and township board, students brightened the park with benches, birdhouses, and a Finnish flag. Flowers were added with the help of a local landscaper and a garden club found through the Internet.

A 30-foot fence painted with the Finnish midnight sun now blocks the blight of a lot across from the grocery. And after an area artist taught students mural painting techniques, they set to work on the fire station.

With the aid of a welder, handyman, and lumber company, students renovated Kaleva's abandoned train depot, turning it into a museum showcasing model trains.

Outside the museum, a rail sculpture designed by students is trumpeted by a student poem explaining that the sculpture's five rails represent five generations—and the top rail, pointing upward, predicts a "better future."

Students even transported an original, decaying log cabin from a farm to a downtown site, where they are restoring it and preparing to turn it into an outdoor theater.

The old meat market has become an art gallery cooperative featuring the work of local artists, many of whom are displaying and selling their work for the first time, says Asiala. In two months, the cooperative sold $2,900 worth of art, 10 percent of which goes to the Kaleva project.

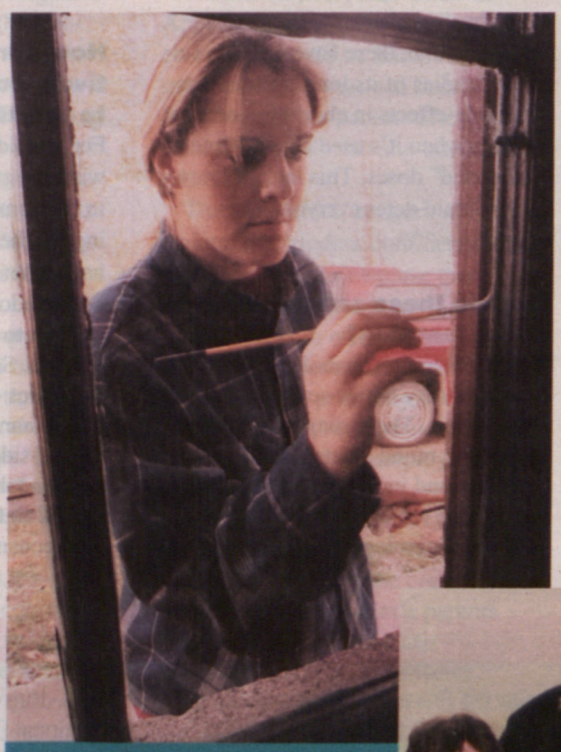
Private grants and individual contributions combine to help keep the Kaleva project blooming and the students learning.

"This class teaches responsibility, independence, team work, and leadership," says Asiala. "It gives students benchmarks of employability through art, math, and English skills. And they can build portfolios for college and jobs."

"These students are realizing that they can make a difference," Crandell adds. "Their self-esteem is higher, attendance is up, and they're learning communication, critical thinking, and conflict resolution skills.

"This project has also given them a sense of identity through art, both personally and within the community," notes Crandell.

And the project has brought the town back to life. At the new welcome center—created from an old grain elevator—the number of visitors has doubled in the past year.



Keith Vandervort

Under the guidance of Deborah Crandell (right) and Cynthia Asiala, students work hard to prepare for their town's centennial celebration.

For More Information

Contact Cynthia Asiala at 616/362-3480 or Deborah Crandell at 616/477-5356. Or write to them at Brethren High School, 4400 High Bridge Rd., Brethren, MI 49619.

Idea Exchange

College Prep

Ann Mitchell, my school's ninth/tenth grade counselor, and I have a program to teach students how to prepare for college.

Working with counselors, students use computer databases in my classroom and in our multimedia lab to find out about required SAT/ACT scores, available majors, scholarships, and more.

We're installing a designated "college-bound" computer, which will be staffed by parents and business leaders who will assist students with the programs, answer questions, and provide career guidance.

Gail Valdez
Gadsden, Alabama

Question of the Day

To encourage home/school interaction, I send a Question of the Day home each day with my second graders. The question usually requires parental assistance to answer. It may be based on school work, or it could be just a fun personal question, like "Where were your grandparents born?"

Children have their own Question of the Day notebook, which goes back and forth throughout the year.

This provide a good launching point for academic sharing and promotes reading and writing skills.

Laura Vinton
Ferndale, Michigan

Works4Me
nea's e-mail classroom tip of the week!

Have a great idea? Pass along your tips to *NEA Today*, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036, Fax 202/822-7206, or E-mail: ideas@neatoday.nea.org.

For more tips, check out NEA's weekly E-mail service, Works4Me. To sign up, send an E-mail to lyris@list.nea.org.

- In the "subject" line, type: sign me up, NEA!
- In the message block, type: subscribe Works4Me
- Send the message.

To submit your own tip, E-mail it to: owner-Works4Me @list.nea.org.

Health

From the Network

The NEA Health Information Network suggests the following helpful resources.

National Nutrition Month
March is National Nutrition Month. For timely, practical information on food and nutrition, call the award-winning Consumer Nutrition Hot Line at 800/366-1655. Among other resources, you'll get a referral to a registered dietitian in your area. For customized answers to your food and nutrition questions, call 900/CALL-AN-RD (225-5267) or E-mail hotline@eatright.org. To find out more about resources and promotional items for healthier eating, visit the American Dietetic Association on the Web at www.eatright.org/.

Don't Breathe Easy
One of five students in America has used an inhalant to get high by the eighth grade. Parents don't know that inhalants—cheap, legal, and accessible products—are as popular among middle school students as marijuana. To learn more about this harmful behavior and how to help prevent it, call the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition at 800/269-4237 and request a free copy of *A Parent's Guide to Preventing Inhalant Abuse.* For more information, visit the Web at www.inhalants.org.

National Inhalants and Poisons Awareness Week is March 15-21. Check the Health column in next month's *NEA Today* for an interview with Harvey Weiss, executive director of the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition.

Indoor Air Quality
The National Safety Council has created a *Teacher's Guide to IAQ,* a guidebook and lesson plan dealing with indoor air quality issues aimed at teachers in grades 4 through 6. The guidebook contains information on indoor air pollutants, in-class and homework activities, presentation slides, handout materials, and games. For a free copy, send a request on school letterhead to the National Safety Council Environmental Health Center, 1025 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Suite 1200, Washington, DC 20036.

What Kids Will Do To Win

Dr. Howard Taras, associate clinical professor at the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine, is a physician for the San Diego city schools and co-chairs a national effort to develop school health guidelines. He spoke with Christine Luong of the NEA Health Information Network on the effect of performance-enhancing drugs on student athletes.

What exactly are performance-enhancing drugs?
These are substances that athletes take to look or perform better.

Anabolic steroids—synthetic derivatives of testosterone—are the best known and have been used the longest.

Creatine, though not a steroid, improves performance in activities requiring rapid bursts of energy. It marginally improves strength, in some studies. And it gives the appearance of larger muscle mass, probably as a result of increases in muscle water.

Do many student athletes abuse these drugs?
Too many do. The Centers for Disease Control estimates from its Youth Risk Behavior Survey that over 3 percent of all students in grades 9 to 12 have used illegal steroids—over 4 percent for males. Other surveys have figures as high as 11 percent of males.

Figures for creatine are not yet known. But its ready availability and growing acceptance should serve as a warning that creatine use among students is going to be significantly higher than the use of steroids.

We know that more females are interested in taking supplements than they were before. I predict that the surveys on use of the newest drugs—those that are legally disguised as nutritional supplements—will show a dramatic increase in use among youth of both sexes and all ethnic groups.

What's the difference between over-the-counter supplements and steroids?
Substances that are chemically like anabolic steroids are manufactured from soy oil and other food substances. These are available over the counter, or even sold as food supplements in natural food stores. But these products may cause the same effects—and side-effects!—as banned or prescribed anabolic steroids.

What are the side-effects?
With anabolic steroids, increased acne, predisposition to muscle and tendon injuries, liver dysfunction or tumors, and increased risk of cardiovascular disease are possible. The risk varies with dose and with duration of abuse. Students who haven't yet completed puberty may stunt their growth. And females may develop irreversible male physical characteristics.

For creatine, there have been no scientific studies of its long-term effects or its side-effects in children—or what happens when it's used beyond "recommended" doses. This lack of knowledge should deter everyone from using it.

How do these substances affect learning?
If students are on anabolic steroids, educators may notice some psychologic effects. These may include wide and erratic mood swings, irrational behavior, and increased aggressiveness. There are unlikely to be any effects on learning from creatine.

Does the use of supplements by sports stars like Mark McGwire affect students?
Most definitely, and most unfortunately, yes! Supplement use is a travesty. It sends a message to our youth that practice, training, and good sleep and dietary habits are no longer adequate to be your best. Having a consultant on drugs and supplement use who's smarter than your opponent's consultant is gaining legitimacy.

How can educators effectively convince students not to use these substances?
For steroids and creatine, we are faced with two problems: broad acceptance in the community, and legal advertising for their use. Even some coaches have been known to promote their use.

The adolescent mind is mature enough to support philosophical discussion. So educators should discuss the ethics of winning in sports with a performance-enhancing drug. If the fear of side-effects doesn't convince some adolescents, maybe we can appeal to their growing sense of righteousness.

Resources

■ The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information has a variety of free publications about performance enhancement drugs and student athletes. Titles include:
- *Physical and Psychological Risks of Anabolic Steroid Use*
- *Questions and Answers About Anabolic Steroids*
- *Steroid Prevention Program Scores With High School Athletes*
- *Tips for Teens About Steroids*
- *Prevention Primer: Steroids.*

To order these and other publications, call 800/729-6686, or visit the Web at www.health.org/pubs.htm.

■ As part of a national federally funded anti-drug campaign, the Office of National Drug Control Policy provides information on steroid abuse, including a list of the street terms used for different types of steroids and steroid use. For more facts, figures, and resources, visit the Web at www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov or call 800/666-3332.

Rights Watch

Student Suicide: Who's Liable?

The suicide of a child is an unthinkable tragedy. But can parents hold school employees legally liable?

Stephen was in second grade when he hanged himself. He used a belt tied to the safety rail of his bunk bed.

In the lawsuit that followed, Stephen's parents blamed his teacher—among others—for their son's death.

On the day he committed suicide, Stephen and his classmates in a Michigan elementary school were shown the film *Nobody's Useless*. It was supposed to teach self-esteem.

The movie depicts the story of a young amputee who becomes so depressed that he tries to kill himself—by hanging. The fictionalized boy's life is changed when he learns from an older friend how to deal with his disability.

Stephen's parents argued that the teacher should be made to pay because the movie was inappropriate for second graders and caused their son's death.

In a 1994 decision, the Michigan Court of Appeals threw out the lawsuit, holding that parents can't sue teachers or other school officials for using an "allegedly improper teaching device."

Unfortunately, the Michigan case is not unique. In recent years, parents have filed a slew of court actions trying to hold school employees legally liable for student suicides.

The results are mixed. Courts in at least five states have rejected these kinds of cases. But courts in three others have ruled that, in certain circumstances, school employees' failure to act can make them or the school legally responsible for a student's suicide.

■ In a case from New Mexico decided by a federal appeals court last fall, a 16-year-old special ed student shot himself after being suspended for threatening a teacher.

The court ruled that the school principal and counselor could be held liable if, as the parents alleged, they took the student home knowing he was suicidal, alone, and had access to firearms, and yet failed to notify his parents.

■ In a 1997 Florida case, another federal appeals court held the Polk County School Board partially responsible for the suicide of a 13-year-old. The court said school officials were negligent because they knew that the student twice had tried to hang himself at school, but neglected to inform his parents.

■ And the Maryland Court of Appeals ruled in 1991 that two school counselors could be liable for the suicide of a 13-year-old because they failed to call her parents after hearing from her friends that she intended to kill herself.

The counselors' concern about maintaining student confidences, the court added, didn't excuse their failure to notify the parents.

But courts in other states have refused to impose liability in these kinds of cases, primarily because of state laws granting immunity to public schools and their employees. For example:

■ An Illinois appellate court in 1997 absolved a school counselor of legal liability where the counselor failed to tell the student's parents about his threats of suicide.

■ The Idaho Supreme Court ruled in 1997 that an English teacher and her school district were immune from liability, despite allegations that the teacher had read entries in the student's journal assignment that indicated he was contemplating suicide.

■ In a 1996 Minnesota case, the court ruled that a school counselor was not responsible for a ninth grader's suicide even though the counselor decided not to tell the parents that the student had written an essay for her English class about a teenage girl committing suicide.

■ And a Texas court held in 1995 that good faith immunity precluded parents' claim that school officials caused their daughter's suicide by expelling her from school for selling drugs.

As these decisions illustrate, the answer to the question whether a school employee can be held legally liable for a student's suicide varies from state to state.

All of the cases that imposed liability, however, involved employees who failed to notify parents that their children had written or talked to others about killing themselves.

The obvious lesson here is that teachers and counselors ought to alert parents if students show any sign of contemplating suicide, even if it means possibly breaching a student's confidence.

The Code of Ethics for the American School Counselors Association explicitly permits disclosure when there may be "clear and imminent danger" to the student or others. In addition, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that a school district lawfully can punish a counselor for failing to report a student's "suicidal tendencies."

—Michael D. Simpson
NEA Office of General Counsel

Suicide Prevention: What You Can Do

Youth suicide has become a major public health problem. The suicide rate among males ages 15-19 has increased fivefold since 1950.

Student suicide is a problem that schools can and must address. If your school doesn't have a comprehensive prevention program, act now to promote the adoption of one—before it's too late.

Several years ago, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conducted a major study of youth suicide prevention efforts nationwide. From that came a resource guide that identifies eight "strategies" that contribute to a successful prevention program. These include:

■ School gatekeeper training—in-service training for school staff on identifying at-risk students and where to refer them for help.

■ Community gatekeeper training—similar training for parents, recreation staff, and other community members.

■ General suicide education—school-based program for students geared to help them identify the warning signs of suicide and to build self-esteem and coping skills

■ Screening programs—programs to identify high-risk youth for targeted assistance.

■ Peer support programs—programs to foster peer relationships, competency development, and social skills among high-risk youth.

■ Crisis centers and hotlines—emergency counseling for those who may be suicidal.

■ Means restriction—activities designed to restrict student access to firearms, drugs, and other common means of committing suicide.

■ Intervention after a suicide—designed to help youth cope with the death or suicide of a peer and to prevent suicide clusters.

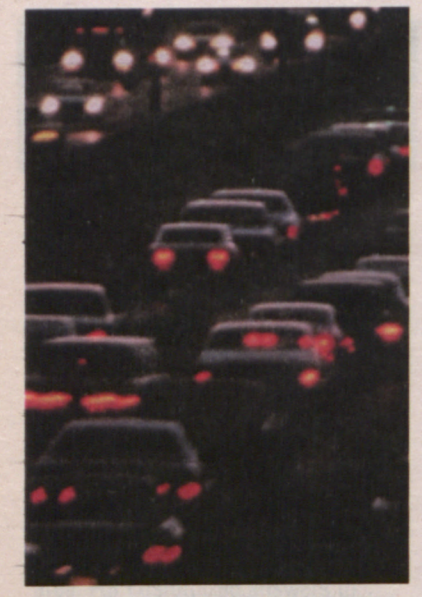
One popular suicide prevention program is "QPR"—Question, Persuade, and Refer. Developed by a psychologist, it's based on the notion that discussion is better than silence.

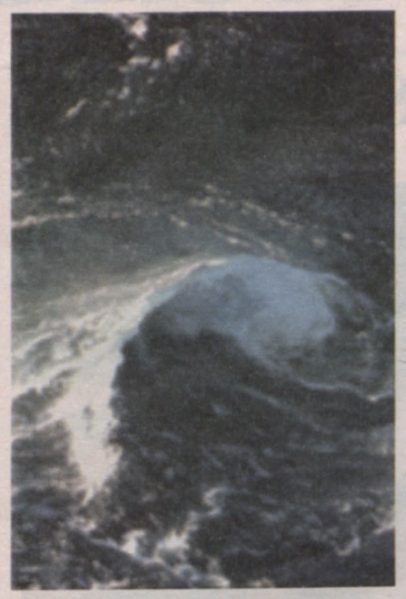
There's no guarantee that any suicide prevention program will ultimately succeed. But schools and staff must make the effort. It might just save a student's life.

—M.D.S.

The CDC guide Youth Suicide Prevention Programs: A Resource Guide *can be found on the CDC Web page at www.cdc.gov.*

You can't **predict** the future...





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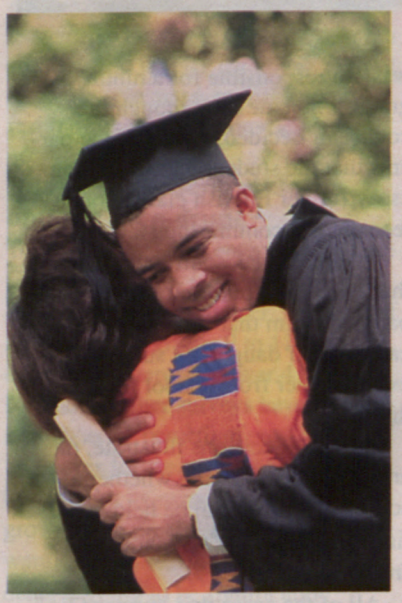

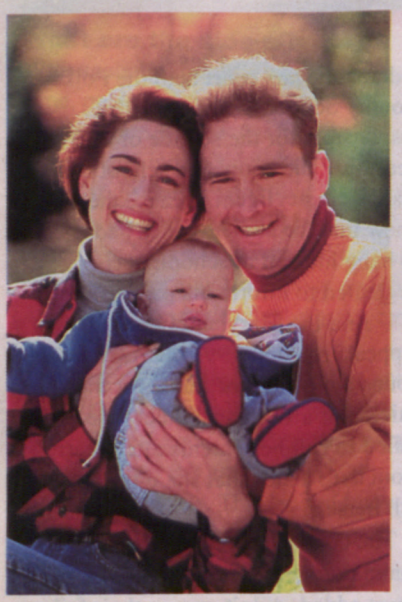

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Note: Your estate will be named if no beneficiary is designated. If enrolling dependents, the member will be the beneficiary.

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I declare by signing below that all the information I have provided is complete and true, and understand that it is the basis of proving insurance under a contract(s) issued by The Prudential Insurance Company of America to the NEA Members Insurance Trust. This insurance is underwritten by The Prudential Insurance Company of America. I certify by signing this Enrollment Form that I am currently an Active, Life, Reserve, Retired, Staff, Student or Substitute member in good standing of the National Education Association.

Signature of Member X _____ Date____/____/____

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**Monthly billing is available through Electronic Funds Transfer Option or credit card option only. With this payment method, your monthly payment is automatically deducted from your bank account or billed to your credit card. If you have any questions, call 1-800-637-4636 for more information.

Your coverage is effective on the first day of the month following Prudential's approval of your enrollment form. 4196TENR

Exclusions: NEA Accidental Death & Dismemberment coverage does not include provisions for losses that occur more than one year (90 days for those age 70 or over) after an accident. (Time limitations are not applicable in Pennsylvania.) This program does not cover losses from: suicide or its attempt; intentionally self-inflicted injury, bodily or mental infirmity or medical or surgical treatment thereof; disease or medical or surgical treatment thereof; infection other than a pyogenic infection occurring through and at the time of an accidental cut or wound; war or any act of war; active duty in the armed forces except as a Reservist called to duty for a training period not exceeding one month; riding or driving in races or testing automotive vehicles on a track, speedway, or proving ground, or riding, boarding or leaving any land or water conveyance operated by a common carrier (not including school buses) or any aircraft, if the covered individual is operating or assisting in the operation, is giving or receiving training, or has duties aboard such conveyance or aircraft, or if the aircraft is being used for test or experimental purposes.

For your protection, certain state laws require the following to appear on this form.

WARNING: Any person who knowingly and with intent to injure, defraud, or deceive any insurance company or other person files an application for insurance or statement of claim containing any materially false information or conceals for the purpose of misleading, information concerning any fact material thereto, commits a fraudulent insurance act which is a crime and subjects such person to criminal and civil penalties.

In addition, any person who commits such a fraudulent act (or facilitates the act): may be subject to fines and confinement in prison (Arkansas residents only), is subject to penalties that may include imprisonment, fines, denial of insurance, and civil damages (Colorado residents only). Also, any insurance company or agent of an insurance company who knowingly provides false, incomplete, or misleading facts or information to a policyholder or claimant with regard to a settlement of award payable insurance proceeds shall be reported to the Colorado Division of Insurance within the Department of Regulatory Agencies, is guilty of a felony of the third degree (Florida residents only), may be subject to penalties including imprisonment fines or denial of insurance benefits (Maine residents only).

Any person who knowingly and with intent to defraud any insurance company or person files an application for insurance or statement of claim containing any materially false information or conceals for the purpose of misleading, information concerning any fact material thereto commits a fraudulent insurance act, which is a crime and subjects such person to criminal and civil penalties (Pennsylvania residents only). This warning does not apply to Virginia residents. This policy provides accident insurance only. It does not provide basic hospital, basic medical or major medical insurance as defined by the New York State Insurance Department.

Important Notice - This policy does not provide coverage for sickness.

NEA AD&D Insurance Plan (Contract series 83500 COV 1004) is underwritten by The Prudential Insurance Company of America, Prudential Plaza, Newark, New Jersey 07102. 1-800-523-5877 GL.98.1095

WHEN YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR ACCEPTANCE FORM, CUT ALONG THE DOTTED LINE AND MAIL.

WHEN YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR ACCEPTANCE FORM, CUT ALONG THE DOTTED LINE AND MAIL.

Bits & Bytes

Bytes for Beginners

Our technology plan calls for three new TVs. I've heard the networks are switching over to digital broadcasting. Should we buy HDTVs so we can receive programs that are broadcast digitally?

Holy smoke signals, Robin! What a great question.

HDTV (high-definition television) is one of several formats vying to be the standard for digital broadcasting in the next millennium. Satellite TV and digital cable TV are two others.

HDTV sets are known for their wide screens (shaped like movie screens) and super-sharp pictures, which produce 1,080 lines of resolution—two or three times sharper than today's typical TV sets.

Networks are just starting to broadcast digital programs. John Glenn's return to space was broadcast in HDTV on many stations, ABC recently did *101 Dalmatians*, and PBS has had its first national HDTV broadcast. You can see digital broadcasts on your current set—but you need an HDTV set to get the sharper picture.

By 2006, all TV shows will be broadcast digitally. In the meantime, you should know:

■ **What's digital broadcasting?** In short, it involves a TV signal that uses the same binary code as a computer. A binary TV signal contains a tremendous amount of information and detail.

■ **What does this mean to you?** Besides a sharper picture, you can expect abundant program selection. Because networks can pack much more information into a binary TV channel signal, it's possible they'll broadcast one channel at high-resolution during evening prime-time, then split that same signal into four, five, or more lower-resolution channels during the day.

■ **So should you buy a digital TV set today?** Not yet. They're incredibly expensive—$7,000 to $10,000—and there's not much to watch.

Have ideas, comments, or questions about technology? You can E-mail webeditor@dear.nea.org or write to Dear Webeditor, NEA Center for Education Technology, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Check out www.nea.org/cet for more questions from beginners and answers from the experts.

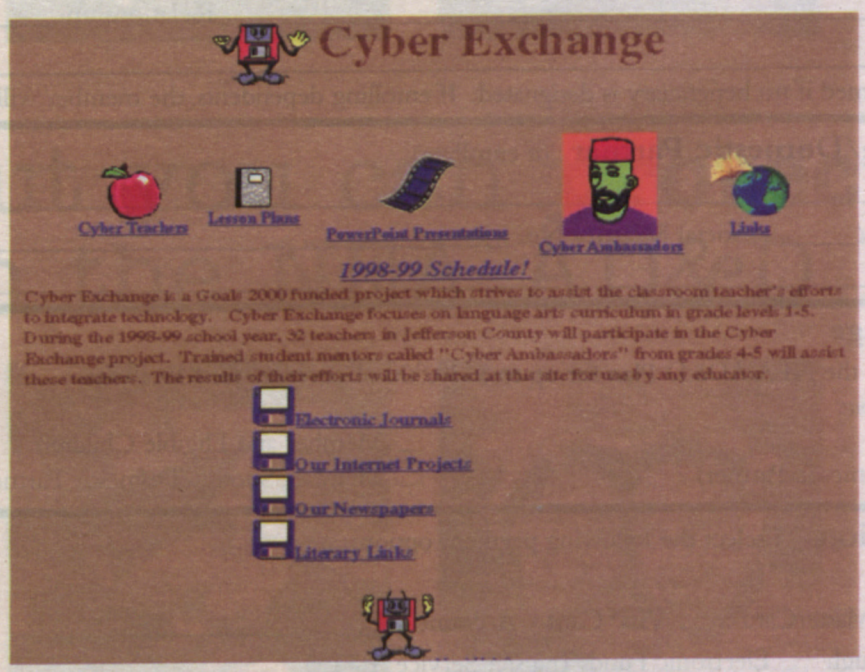
My favorite Web site . . .

"Home Run Record (www.homerunrecord.com), a site on baseball stats, has math connections galore! From making predictions to graphing and fractions, kids go nuts for this stuff."

Mary Ann Knighton, district technical curriculum specialist, Bozeman, Montana

Wired Classroom

Reading Resources To Spare


Cyber Exchange
Cyber Teachers
Lesson Plans
PowerPoint Presentations
Cyber Ambassadors
Links
1998-99 Schedule!
Cyber Exchange is a Goals 2000 funded project which strives to assist the classroom teacher's efforts to integrate technology. Cyber Exchange focuses on language arts curriculum in grade levels 1-5. During the 1998-99 school year, 32 teachers in Jefferson County will participate in the Cyber Exchange project. Trained student mentors called "Cyber Ambassadors" from grades 4-5 will assist these teachers. The results of their efforts will be shared at this site for use by any educator.
Electronic Journals
Our Internet Projects
Our Newspapers
Literary Links

Teachers in Jefferson County, Tennessee, are participating in Cyber Exchange, a Goals 2000 project that uses technology to teach reading skills in grades one to five.

Our teachers are creating lesson plans and PowerPoint presentations focused on teaching specific reading objectives—and we've put these resources on our Web site for other educators to use.

You'll find our materials on the Web at http://user.icx.net/~campbelld/cyber_exchange/cyberexchange_index.htm.

Connie Campbell
Technology trainer
Dandridge, Tennessee

Field Trip Slide Show

At Perry Middle School in Ohio, we use our Web site to prepare students for field trips. We take kids on virtual visits to give them some knowledge of what they'll see. We also use the Web to share the trip with parents and the community afterward.

During our eighth graders' recent trip to Washington, D.C., teachers took digital cameras and captured pictures of students in many locations. After they returned, one teacher created a 70-slide PowerPoint presentation of the trip. We converted the PowerPoint file to an HTML document and published it on our Web site—all within three days of the trip, while it was still fresh in our minds.

The slide show helped students verbally share their adventure with parents. Folks in the community could see what the students experienced—as well as the value of field trips.

To see our Washington trip and our "Students on Location" Web pages, go to www.perry-lake.k12.oh.us/pms/index.html.

Cheryl Ward
Technology integration facilitator
Perry, Ohio

Playing the Market

My third graders are watching six stocks from the New York Stock Exchange. They buy and sell stocks with "Ross dollars" earned in various ways—completing room jobs, performing random acts of kindness, achieving perfect spelling tests.

Each morning, students log on to Yahoo's finance site—quote.yahoo.com—and find the current stock prices. They post the daily close on our "Big Board."

Students follow the year-to-date trend graphs for each stock and compute their personal profits and losses daily. Some graph their stocks.

This is a self-sustaining extension activity for math, and I only oversee the operations. Students act as stock-brokers and manage the day-to-day operations. Parents love it, too!

Micki Ross
Third grade teacher
Glencoe, Illinois

Charting Plant Growth

For a science unit on the growth cycle of plants, we planted vegetable seeds in our classroom "Root Vue Farm" and prepared to plant tulip and crocus bulbs outside. We took notes—collected data—on the process and recorded daily observations and care.

We used various Internet sites to research how to plant bulbs and learn more about planting zones—and the project grew and grew! Most students began by typing in keywords such as tulips or bulbs. We found many useful gardening sites on the Internet—one of our favorites is HomeTime (www3.hometime.com/projects/landgrdn.htm).

We also used our computers to type our data in narrative form. We plan to construct a timeline when the project is completed this spring.

We're fortunate at Gateway Middle School to have a greenhouse and enclosed courtyard, but this project can be done in any outdoor area. Results from different terrains can be compared and used for science fair projects.

Pamela Cuevas
Special education teacher
St. Louis, Missouri

Want a weekly tip on using technology? Subscribe to the Wired Classroom E-mail list. Just send an E-mail to ***join-etoolsweekly@list.nea.org*** *(no subject or message needed).*

My favorite software . . .

"AppleWorks (Apple, 800/795-1000, $99) serves educators' every need. Gradebook, seating chart, test maker, spreadsheet, slide show—there's no end to what you can create."

Del Conkright, retired middle school computer instructor and counselor, Port Austin, Michigan

Friendly User

A New Kind of Bilingualism

Iowa students are learning Spanish—and becoming technologically fluent to boot.

Who:
Al Bode, Spanish teacher, Charles City High School, Charles City, Iowa

E-mail:
abode@comet.charles-city.k12.ia.us

Inspiration:
When Bode got his first glimpse of the Internet at a conference in the early '90s, he knew right away that his teaching would change forever.

"I thought, this is it. I know what I want," he recalls.

Bode came home, won some grants, got his school wired, and started integrating technology into his Spanish classes in a way that proves right all the hype about a shrinking planet.

"Foreign language education, E-mail, and the World Wide Web are a perfect fit," Bode says. "I think it's a better fit than math or science. This technology is all about communication."

For Bode, the Internet is a conduit for the cultural and linguistic immersion that students need to master a new tongue—immersion that's nearly impossible to come by in a rural, homogenous community like Charles City.

When Bode's students read the Yucatan's daily newspaper online or write E-mail to pen pals in San Juan, they're getting an authentic learning experience that's hard to top.

"E-mail has broadened students' experience of the world," Bode says. "They have to consider there's a culture beyond what they're living in. If we were just using a regular textbook, it wouldn't work as well."

Lesson:
With just two computers in his classroom—but a lab next door—Bode manages to integrate technology in his teaching every day.

The result is a new kind of fluency. For Bode's students, Spanish verbs and HTML codes blur into a seamless process of learning to communicate. The means for connecting to the world—language and technology—become transparent, Bode says.

Here's how it happens:

- From school, home, or anywhere there's Web access, students can log on to Bode's Web page and find interactive worksheets to test themselves on vocabulary and spelling—and see their scores instantly.

"Students learn much quicker now," Bode says. "We're able to go on to things we never could before."

- Students design personal Web pages with biographical sketches and photos to help them find Spanish-speaking pen pals.

"They do this for communication, but, on the way, they learn HTML and how to use a Flex-Cam," says Bode, adding that parents must give permission before students' photos and names can appear on the Web site.

- Bode's students link via E-mail with a class learning English in Puerto Rico to discuss the displacement of Cherokee and Taino Indians and debate the case for Puerto Rican statehood.

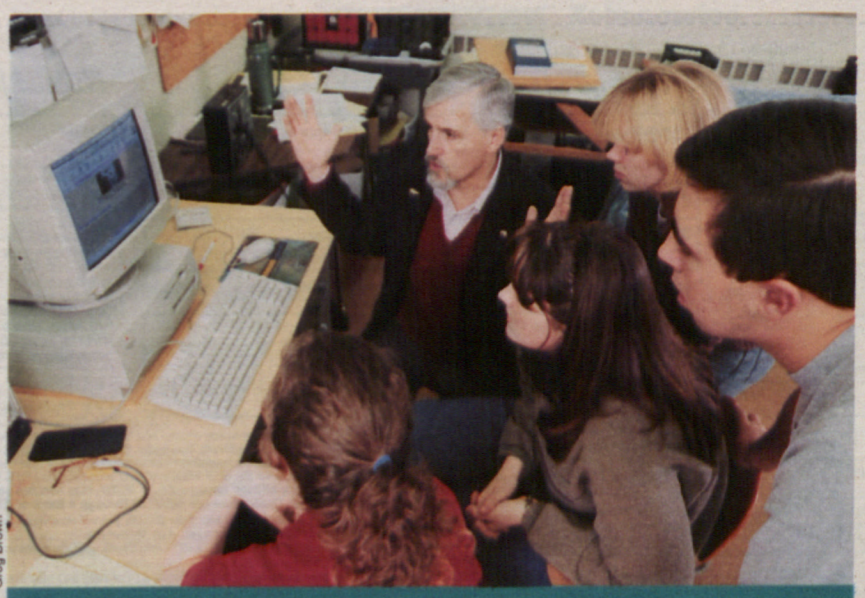
Click:
"I don't know how you can teach a foreign language without involving the rest of the world," Bode says.

"Textbooks are five or six years old once you get them," he adds. "Look at all that's up to date on the Web. Look at all the interactivity on the Web."

For More Information

Go to Bode's Web site (http://comet.charles-city.k12.ia.us/Bode/QuickIndex.html) to find:

- *Links to more than 110 sites for foreign language teachers.*
- *Interactive Spanish worksheets—which can be completed and scored by students right online.*
- *A "Web Quest"—a unit of readings and questions in Spanish and English—about the plight of Cherokee and Taino Indians.*



Greg Brown

¿Hablas HTML? Iowa Spanish teacher Al Bode uses the Internet in his classes every day—and kids are mastering a new tongue faster than ever.

New & Noteworthy

Just for Young Writers
The Young Writer's Clubhouse (www.realkids.com/club.shtml) is a great place to send aspiring young writers. They'll find success stories about young authors, FAQs, chats, and lists of contests.

Let There Be Light
How Far Does Light Go is an online project that asks students to examine light and defend one of two theories. Educators will find project goals, lesson plans, and more on the Web at www.kie.berkeley.edu/KIE/web/hf.html.

Accounting Resource
AccountingStudents (www.accountingstudents.com) is the complete online resource for accounting students.

Students will find career tips and study guides, resume and job information, scholarship opportunities, and a forum for networking.

Study Help for Students
Cyberstudy 101 is a subscription-only Web site that helps students review their class notes. Students type or cut and paste their notes into a form that generates a series of customized quizzes.

A subscription costs $29.99 per course or semester. Take a free tour of the Web site's features by pointing your browser to www.cyberstudy101.com.

Learn About Physics
Physics 2000 (www.Colorado.edu/physics/2000/) is an interactive Web site that introduces physics topics ranging from microwave ovens to electromagnetic particles.

Talk to Us

Have a nifty classroom tip or lesson plan that uses technology? E-mail a description (under 200 words, please!) to **wiredclassroom@list.nea.org**.

Is there a Web site, CD-ROM, or piece of software you can't live without? E-mail your favorites—and why you love them—to **myfavoritetech@list.nea.org**.

Or send your responses by regular mail to *NEA Today*, or by Fax to 202/822-7206, or through the Web at www.nea.org/cet.

Those published here will receive a sparkling *NEA Today* mug!

Announcing our lowest rate ever.

3.9% APR†

A great rate to pay off your high-interest accounts.

The NEA *Platinum Plus*℠ MasterCard® Credit Card, one of the best credit card values in the country, is now even better. That's because the introductory Annual Percentage Rate (APR) is just 3.9% on balance transfers and cash advance checks for four months, with the variable APR on purchases currently only 14.24%!

As an NEA member, there's no annual fee and you'll have access to the highest credit line available anywhere. Plus, you'll enjoy such exclusive benefits as:††

- Automatic MasterPurchase® Protection that covers purchases against theft and damage, and extends eligible warranties
- Free year-end summary of charges
- $1 million worth of Common Carrier Travel Accident Insurance

And, of course, you can count on Priority Customer Service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, including holidays.

So why not call or complete the application below today and take advantage of all the savings and benefits of NEA *Platinum Plus*? Because at this rate, you'll want to consolidate your high-interest balances right away!

1-888-758-7946, priority code JTZO.

nea Member Benefits
www.neamb.com

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the new standard

About you

JTZO JN:900-951 JO:617 ES:900-954 JQ:182

Name	
Address	
City	State Zip
Home Phone ( )	Business Phone ( )
Social Security Number	Date of Birth
Mother's Maiden Name (For identification only)	

About your finances

Employer	Position
Years There	Annual Salary $
Other Income* $	Source

*Alimony, child support, or separate maintenance income need not be revealed if you do not wish it considered as a basis for repayment.

Residence: ❑ Own ❑ Buying ❑ Rent ❑ Other

Monthly Payment $

Request for additional card

Name of Authorized User	Relationship

*I have read this application and everything I have stated in it is true. MBNA America Bank, N.A. (MBNA) is authorized to check my credit, employment history or any other information and to report to others such information and credit experience with me. If I do not qualify for the NEA *Platinum Plus* account, I will automatically be considered for the NEA School Days account. I understand that the acceptance or use of any card issued will be subject to the terms of this application and the Credit Card Agreement that will be sent with the card, and agree to be responsible for all charges incurred according to such terms. I am at least 18 years of age. I consent to and authorize MBNA America Bank, N.A. and MBNA's affiliates to monitor and/or record my telephone conversations with any of their representatives to better ensure quality service. I accept that MBNA may, at its discretion, periodically consider any account for an automatic upgrade. **Information about me or my account may be shared among MBNA Corp. and its subsidiaries for marketing or administrative purposes. I may prohibit such sharing of information, other than information pertaining solely to transactions or experiences between me and MBNA (or its subsidiaries), by writing to MBNA at P.O. Box 15342, Wilmington, DE and including my name, address, home phone number and the applicable MBNA account number(s).**

X *Signature Date

Annual Fee	None.
†Annual Percentage Rate (APR)	NEA *Platinum Plus* account: 14.24% for purchases; NEA School Days account: 14.85% for purchases; each APR may vary.
Variable-Rate Information	Your APR may vary. The APR is determined by adding a margin to the U.S. Prime Rate as published in *The Wall Street Journal* on the 15th of March, June, September, and December. For the NEA *Platinum Plus* account, the margin is 6.49 percentage points, for the NEA School Days account the margin is 7.1 percentage points. On December 15, 1998 the U.S. Prime Rate was 7.75%.
Grace Period for Repayment of Balances for Purchases	At least 25 days from statement closing date.
Method of Computing the Balance for Purchases	Average daily balance (including new transactions).
Transaction Fee for Purchases	Transaction fee for the purchase of wire transfers, money orders, bets, lottery tickets, and casino gaming chips: 2% of each such purchase; $2 minimum, $10 maximum.
Transaction Fee for Cash Advances and Fees for Paying Late or Exceeding the Credit Limit	Transaction fee for Bank and ATM cash advances: 2% of each cash advance; $2 minimum, $10 maximum. Transaction fee for credit card cash advance checks: 1% of each cash advance; $2 minimum, $10 maximum. Late Payment Fee: $15. Over-the-Credit-Limit Fee: $15.

†The current promotional APR offer for cash advance checks and balance transfers made with either account is 3.9% through your first four statement closing dates commencing the month after your account is opened. Thereafter, the APR will vary according to the Variable-Rate Information appearing at left, and will apply to all new and outstanding cash advance balances (consisting of cash advance check and balance transfer transactions). The current indexed APR for cash advance checks and balance transfers is 14.24% for the NEA *Platinum Plus* account, or 14.85% for the NEA School Days account, each APR may vary. Cash advances cannot be used to pay off or pay down any MBNA® issued account. **MBNA may allocate your payments to balances (including new transactions) with lower APRs before balances with higher APRs. Cash advances obtained through a Bank or ATM transaction are not eligible for the promotional 3.9% APR offer.**

††If your application is approved with a credit line of less than $5,500, you will receive an NEA School Days Credit Card. NEA School Days Card Customer benefits differ from those available with the NEA *Platinum Plus* account, e.g., Year-end summary of charges and MasterPurchase Protection are not available and maximum Common Carrier Travel Accident Insurance is up to $500,000. Certain restrictions apply to these and other benefits as described in the benefits brochures which are sent soon after your account is opened.

The NEA is not involved in the credit decision process. Absolutely NO membership dues are used to market this program. All applications will be subject to a confidential standard review by MBNA America.

MBNA America Bank, N.A. is the exclusive issuer and administrator of the *Platinum Plus* credit card program.

The NEA Credit Card Program® has been developed for NEA members and their families only. If a member decides not to renew his/her membership, that person and their family will no longer be eligible to receive the preferred rates and fees offered through the NEA Credit Card Program. If eligible, a replacement card will be offered.

The information about the costs of the card described in this application is accurate as of 12/98. The information may have changed after that date. To find out what may have changed, call us at (888) 758-7946. TTY users please call (800) 833-6262.

Any account opened in response to this offer will be governed by the laws of Delaware.

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Mail your signed application to: NEA Credit Card Program; c/o MBNA America Bank, N.A.; P.O. Box 981054; El Paso, TX 79998-9937

CCNT0299

Heads Up!

TV Tips

Stage to Screen

Turner Classic Movies, February 1-11, TCM, 6 a.m. ET. This re-airing of TCM BY THE BOOK's "Stage to Screen" series offers literature and English teachers a second opportunity to tape and use pre-selected films based on classic stage plays. Films include *The Philadelphia Story* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.* To enroll and receive free curriculum materials, call 800/344-6219 or check the Web at http://tcm.turner.com/by_the_book/.

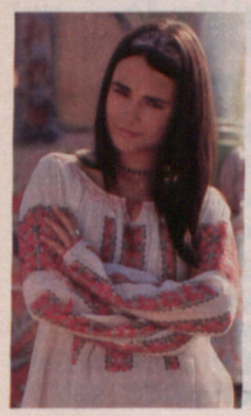
I'll Make Me a World

PBS, Monday-Wednesday, February 1-3, 9-11 p.m. ET, check local listings. Starting with the dawn of the 20th century, this six-hour documentary highlights African-American creative achievement on the American cultural stage. The series profiles musicians, writers, actors, dancers, and others whose talents have shaped American culture. For lesson plans and classroom activities for grades 4-12, go to www.blackside.com.

John Henry

Disney Channel, Tuesday, February 2, 7-7:30 p.m. ET. Narrated by Denzel Washington, this half-hour animated special celebrates Black History Month with a tale about an African-American hero who journeys to the wilderness where he finds men of all colors working together to build a great railroad.

Also airing later this month (check local listings): Whoopi Goldberg narrates "Koi and the Kola Nuts," an animated African folktale about a young boy who craves the admiration of his village.



The '60s

NBC, Sunday-Monday, February 7-8, 9-11 p.m. ET. check local listings. Blending history, fiction, and music, this four-hour program tells the story of two American families—one white and one Black—who are torn apart by the forces of the civil rights movement, the student revolution, and the Vietnam War.

The Underground Railroad

The History Channel, Saturday, February 20, 8-10 p.m. ET. This documentary looks at the alliance between Blacks and whites that provided freedom for slaves. Neither underground nor a railroad, this historical alliance helped more than 75,000 slaves escape on foot, in coffins and crates, and as stowaways. For a free teacher's manual, visit The History Channel on the Web at www.historychannel.com.

Passing Glory

TNT, Sunday, February 21, 8-10 p.m. ET. Based on a true story and set in segregation-era Louisiana, this film tells the story of an unorthodox African-American priest who coaches an all-Black high school basketball team. When he organizes a game between his undefeated team and a rival undefeated white team, the competition results in mutual respect that crosses racial boundaries. For free curriculum materials, call 800/344-6219 or visit http://learning.turner.com.

Life's Little Questions

PBS, Wednesday, February 24, 8-9 p.m. ET, check local listings. In this program from the "Scientific American Frontiers" series, host Alan Alda fields the answers to some of life's simplest questions, such as: Why are peppers hot? Is there a cure for jet lag? How do sand castles stand up? For free teaching guides for grades 5-12, call 800/315-5010 or go to the Web at www.pbs.org/saf/.

Alice in Wonderland

NBC, Sunday, February 28, 8-11 p.m. ET. Lewis Carroll's colorful tale of a young girl's adventures in a land where forward is backward, up is down, and anything imaginable is possible. High school English teachers can contact their local NBC affiliate for a free study guide.

The Great Museums

Knowledge TV, Thursdays, 10-10:30 a.m.. ET. This commercial-free series features museums, large and small, across the country. Each episode highlights the exhibits, archival materials, and staff of a museum. Past museums featured include the Ellis Island Immigration Museum and the Museum of American Folk Art. For classroom materials, call 800/727-5663, ext. 8702, or go to www.knowledgetv.com.

The Artists' Specials: Edgar Degas

HBO and HBO Family, February, check local listings. Using imaginative storytelling and visual imagery, this new series is designed to expose young viewers to the world of art. Includes a fictional encounter between the artist and a young person influenced by his or her work. Upcoming specials will feature Mary Cassatt, Michelangelo, Claude Monet, and Rembrandt.

Zoboomafoo

PBS, Monday-Friday, check local listings. This new half-hour wildlife series from brothers Martin and Chris Kratt (from *Kratts' Creatures*) uses music, songs, and sounds from around the world to teach two- to six-year-old children how to respect and care for animals. The action takes place at the Animal Junction outpost and features Zoboo, a friendly lemur represented by both a real animal and a puppet. For materials and activities, check the Web at www.pbs.org/zoboo.

KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., provides these listings. For additional listings and information, check the KIDSNET Web site at www.kidsnet.org.

school stories

Episodes of* School Stories*—produced by NEA and the Learning Channel to provide an insightful look inside America's classrooms—are now on videotape and available from the NEA Professional Library. Here are just a few of the titles in stock:

Great School by Design

Why do thousands of educators trek to Chula Vista, California, just to visit an elementary school? Walk the halls and classrooms to learn how a school's design creates a winning environment for a diverse student body. 1997, VHS, Stock #7621-4-0-0. $16.95.

Single-Sex Classes?

For three years, boys and girls at Marsteller Middle School in Manassas, Virginia, have been attending both single-sex and mixed classes as part of a gender study. Find out what the teachers and students have discovered as a result. 1997, VHS, Stock #7619-2-00-0. $16.95.

Space Camp Challenge

Sixteen special education students work their way through a program designed to challenge America's gifted and talented. Hear the story of how imagination and proper support gave them the confidence to succeed. 1997. VHS, Stock #7617-6-00-0. $16.95.

Better Business, Stronger Schools

See how a community and school in Wendell, North Carolina, established an innovative school-to-work program with the multinational Siemens Corporation. 1996, VHS, Stock #7607-9-00-0. $19.95.

Class Act: A Teacher Profile

Here's the story of Rhode Island teacher Mary Lee Drouin, who uses her performing ability—along with passion, imagination, and creativity—to teach English literature to her high school students. 1996. VHS, Stock #7610-9-00-0. $19.95.

To order any of the above titles, call the NEA Professional Library at 800/229-4200.

Heads Up

Free or Inexpensive

Time for a Change?
If you're just getting started on the road to restructuring your middle or high school, you may want to check

out *The School Change Checklist*. This 56-page booklet will help you write a mission statement, create a new curriculum, and get the financial and other support you need to make a difference for your school and your students. $4.50 plus s&h for NEA members. Stock #2155-X-00-FF. Contact the NEA Professional Library at 800/229-4200.

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Call 1-800-637-4636

(Hearing impaired members may call 1-800-445-1269)
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (or Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) ET

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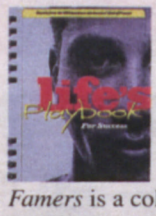


Secrets to Success
Life's Playbook for Success: Secrets from the GTE Academic All-America Hall of Famers is a collection of short essays and quotes about academic, athletic, and life success, all written by GTE academic/athletic hall of famers. $10 includes s&h. Discounts for bulk orders. Speakers available for school assemblies. Contact GTE at 800/315-5010. On the Web: www.lifesplaybook.com.

Science Writing
The Art of Science Writing is a book for secondary school science and English teachers and anyone else interested in learning to write about science. $15.95 plus $4 s&h. Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 5 Union Square West, New York, NY 10003. Call 888/BOOKS-TW for more information.

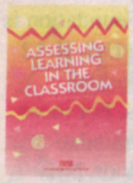
Black Books Galore
The three mothers who founded a group that organizes festivals for African-American children's books—will help you choose the best titles for your students in *Black Books Galore: Guide to Great African American Children's Books*. Includes a description of 500 books, biographies of selected authors, a subject index, and a book rating system. $15.95 at local bookstores or call 800/225-5945. On the Web: www.wiley.com.

Internet Guides
The information you need to use the Internet now fits in your pocket with *The Family Internet Pocket Guide*. This tiny book contains easy-to-use lessons on Web sites, E-mail, news groups, and more. $3.95 plus $2.50 s&h. Contact Grapevine Publications, Inc., P.O. Box 2449, Corvallis, OR 97339-2449, 800/338-4331. On the Web: www.read-gpi.com.

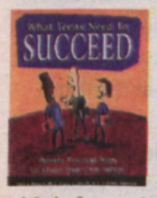
What's the Co/Motion?
The Co/Motion Guide to Youth-Led Social Change is an in-depth guide for young people on how to organize grassroots campaigns. Includes tons of tips, inspiring profiles, and lists of potential allies. $30 plus $5 s&h. Contact the Alliance for Justice, 2000 P St., N.W., Suite

Heads Up

712, Washington, DC 20036, 202/822-6070. Fax: 202/822-6068.



Learning To Assess
NEA commissioned two leading experts on student assessment—Jay McTighe and Steven Ferrara—to produce *Assessing Learning in the Classroom.* Their booklet includes principles of effective assessment, approaches and methods, and a framework for planning. Useful for teachers at all levels. $5.95 plus s&h for NEA members. Stock #2070-7-00-FF. Contact the NEA Professional Library, 800/229-4200.



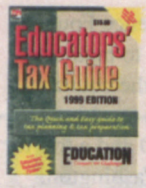
Talking to Teens
What Teens Need To Succeed: Proven, Practical Ways To Shape Your Own Future provides teens with information on how they can lay the foundation for rewarding lives. Based on surveys of more than 370,000 youth across the United States. $14.95 plus $4.25 to Free Spirit Publishing, 400 First Ave. North, Suite 616, Minneapolis, MN 55401. Call 800/735-7323. On the Web: www.freespirit.com.

Number Play
Mario Salvadori's *Math Games for Middle School: Challenges and Skill-Builders for Students at Every Level* provides teachers and parents of middle schoolers with math problems on addition, subtraction, plane and space geometry, graphing, probability, and more. $16.95 plus $5 s&h. Contact Chicago Review Press, 800/888-4741.

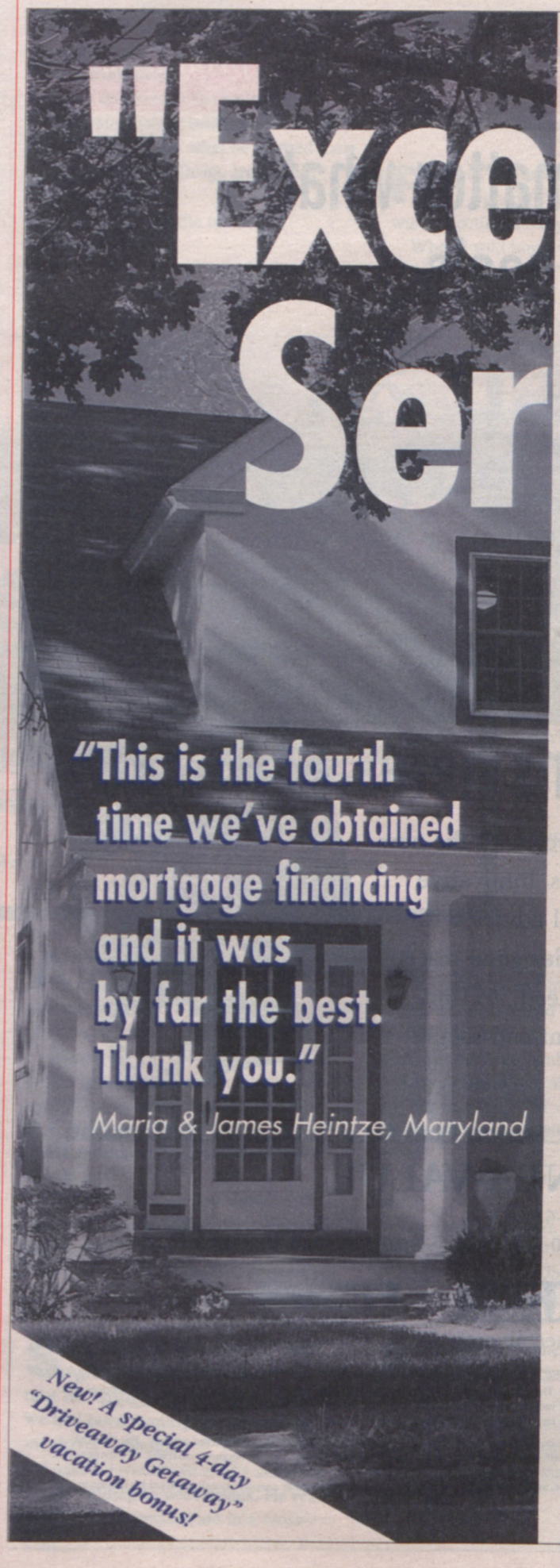
Free, Free, Free
Learn where to find free pamphlets, posters, charts, and more, using *The Teacher's Sourcebook of Free (and Inexpensive) Materials.* Includes details on 200 organizations that give away good stuff. #IF01370. $5.95 plus $3 s&h to Instructional Fair, TS Denison, P.O. Box 1650, Grand Rapids, MI 49501.

Women in History
Women Putting Our Stamp on America is a large, full-color poster honoring women in American history who have left more than an impression. $7.95 plus $4.50 s&h. From the National Women's History Project, 7738 Bell Rd., Windsor, CA 95492, 707/838-6000. On the Web: www.nwhp.org. Send E-mail to nwhp@aol.com.

Tax Time
Learn about 26 special tax topics for



professional educators by reading this year's *Educators' Tax Guide.* Contains information on deductions for educational expenses, home offices, depreciation for equipment, tuition tax credits, and Roth IRAs. Special NEA discount: $10 includes s&h. Contact Educational Tax Publication Services toll-free at 877/569-8299. E-mail: etps@aol.com.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Heads Up

Awards

Presidential Awards

The Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science, started by the White House and sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NFS), are presented to math and science educators across the country who exhibit excellence in teaching.

Winners receive $7,500 and a trip to the award ceremony in Washington, D.C. Deadline: February 27.

For more information, call Janice Earle at 703/306-0422. Send E-mail to jearle@nfs.gov. On the Web: www/ehr.nsf.gov/EHR/ESIE/awards/default.htm.

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Grants

Teaching About Japan

The United States-Japan Foundation is offering grants to enhance U.S. K-12 instruction on Japan. Proposals accepted on a rolling basis. For more information, contact the Foundation at 145 East 32nd St., 12th Floor, New York, NY 10016, 212/481-8757. On the Web, go to www.us-jf.org.

Fellowships

C-SPAN in the Classroom

C-SPAN is offering three month-long summer fellowships in Washington, D.C., to high school teachers who use C-SPAN programming in their classrooms. Teachers will also receive a $3,000 stipend, $2,000 to cover housing and other expenses, and airfare. Deadline: February 26.

For details, contact the 1999 C-SPAN High School Teacher Fellowship Program, C-SPAN, c/o Education Relations, 400 North Capitol St., N.W., Suite 650, Washington, DC 20001, 800/523-7586. On the Web, go to www.c-span.org/classroom/opportunities/fellowships.htm.

Field Research

The Earthwatch Institute is now accepting applications from K-12 teachers interested in participating in two-week field research expeditions around the world. Teachers can receive partial or full fellowships and travel stipends. Deadline: February 15.

Contact Matt Craig, Earthwatch Institute, 680 Mt. Auburn St., Box 9104, Watertown, MA 02471, 617/926-8200, ext. 118. On the Web: www.earthwatch.org/ed/fellowship.html.

Technology Education

The Earth and Space Science Technological Education Project is offering professional development workshops for teams of secondary school teachers. The two-week sessions will focus on classroom use of computer and information-based technologies in earth, space, and environmental sciences. Deadline: March 1.

For details, contact Holly Devaul, The Geological Society of America, 3300 Penrose Pl., Boulder, CO 80301, 303/447-2020, ext. 150. Send E-mail to hdevaul@geosociety.org.

Events

Peace Corps Day

Peace Corps Day will take place on March 2. For a global education resource and 500 great pictures from around the world, check out the Peace Gallery at www.peacegallery.org.

In the Light Lane

Any Ol' Leonardo Will Do

A third grade girl came into the media center and excitedly asked, "Mrs. Hall, do you have any books about Leonardo DiCaprio?"

"That heartthrob from *Titanic*?" I replied. "No, I'm sorry."

The girl's head fell in despair.

"Okay, where are your other biographies?" she asked.

I directed her to the biography section. In a few minutes, she approached the checkout counter with a book and sadly said, "Well, I guess this will have to do."

It was a book about Leonardo *da Vinci.*

Marla Hall
Prescott, Wisconsin

When I was teaching in a lab school on a college campus back in the 1970s, Nathan, one of my second graders, had some learning problems—and a great interest in war and disaster.

One day my student teacher—anxious to help him with subtraction and eager to impress me—asked, "Nathan, what would you have if you had seven airplanes and you lost three?"

Without a moment's hesitation, he replied, "A greatly reduced striking force."

Linda Cookson
Americus, Kansas

As we studied diversity, my fifth graders learned about concepts such as prejudice, stereotyping, and tolerance.

A few days later, we viewed a film in which an African-American boy was watched suspiciously and treated unfairly in a convenience store.

One of my students shouted out, "Hey, that's radiotyping!"

Amy Kester
Sun Valley, Nevada

Last year, for our school's "Drug-Free Day," my kindergarten class had the theme, "Hats Off To Being Drug-Free." On that Friday, we all wore hats to school and gathered in the gym for a Stomp-Out to show how we stomp out drugs.

I explained to my students, without going into too much detail, that drugs were bad and that they should stay away from them.

At a conference the following week, one mother told me that when she asked her son what he learned that day, he replied, "Drugs are free on Fridays, Mom!"

Obviously not the message I intended.

Jackie Dula
Bound Brook, New Jersey

"We're working on composition today. Tomorrow we'll deal with copyright infringement."

After an exciting day at the fair, my fourth graders and I were discussing all the animals we had seen, especially the rabbits.

One of my eager boys proceeded up to the front of the room to show everyone his rabbit pelt. I asked him how he got the pelt.

He explained, "They shaved it off the bunny."

To which another boy shouted, "I wonder how much shaving cream they had to use!"

Jenny Egly
Spokane, Washington

Since students in one of my reading classes were preparing to take the written driver's permit test, we had been reading and discussing the driver's manual.

I asked a student to read a sentence about yielding to pedestrians. He read, "When Presbyterians are in a crosswalk...."

I asked him what he was supposed to do if there was a Baptist in a crosswalk.

Carol Carney
Harrodsburg, Kentucky

Recently, a student failed to get a note signed by his mother—who was expecting a baby.

When I told him I would need to call her, he replied, "You won't be able to get her today. She's going into the hospital this morning because they're going to seduce her."

Sue Muffo
Blacksburg, Virginia

My second grade music class was singing a song about the many ways to say hello. We then brainstormed a good list, including bonjour, aloha, and ciao.

We were just about finished adding to our list when a hand shot up in the air. A boy with a wide smile said, "I can say hello in cursive!"

Jane Herth
Alexandria, Minnesota

While talking with my fourth graders about interests outside of school, I explained that I work as an EMT (emergency medical technician) for our local ambulance service.

Later, I heard one of my students tell her mother, "Did you know Mr. Dodge works at a bank on weekends?"

Surprised, her mother questioned her.

The student replied, "He's an ATM!"

Christopher Dodge
Greensboro, Vermont

A colleague of mine asked her first grade students if they knew what a vowel was.

One little fellow raised his hand and said, "I don't know what it is, but I know you can buy them on 'Wheel of Fortune.'"

Joan Ramo
Caribou, Maine

Weather Or Not

The first rainy day in September, the school secretary announced on the loudspeaker, "There will be inside recess today."

An unexpected cheer came from my first graders. Inside recess usually means we talk quietly at our desks. But these students had never had inside recess before.

As I walked by Bridget's desk, I heard her ask, "How will they get the monkey bars through the door?"

Sue Hartel
Ridley Park, Pennsylvania

Last December, we had our first significant snowfall of the season. That morning a fellow teacher's third graders were writing in their journals.

One boy wrote, "Today looks like a picture that needs to be colored."

Marilin Ginnow
Jackson, Michigan

One very cold morning one of my second graders came in and exclaimed, "I bet the *window factory* is below zero today!"

Wally Spencer
Judsonia, Arkansas

Our elementary school has safety patrols who help unload buses. They also greet and help arriving teachers.

One very cold morning, a particularly rosy-cheeked student ran to get my bags.

"Tom, why is it you're so happy and enjoying yourself in the cold, while I'm freezing?" I asked.

He grinned, dropped my bag by my door, and said, "The older. . .the colder!"

Alfie Freeman
Vineland, New Jersey

Got Laughs?

■ Have a funny school story, anecdote, or vignette you'd like to share with other NEA members? You can send contributions to "In the Light Lane," *NEA Today,* 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Fax: 202/822-7206. Send E-mail to neatoday@nea.org.

■ Want a classroom chuckle delivered to your E-mail box once a week? Subscribe to the new "In the Light Lane" mailing list. Just send an E-mail to **join-lightlane@list.nea.org** (no subject or message needed).

People

Hail to Mr. Holley

With the eyes of 65,000 people fixed on the 50-yard line, NEA-Retired member **Ernest Holley** stepped to the microphone to deliver the national anthem.

His tenor voice boomed through Jack Kent Cooke Stadium, the home of the Washington Redskins professional football team.

At that moment, Holley fulfilled a dream he's had all his adult life: to sing the national anthem accompanied by the Washington Redskins band. Heaven.

"It's impossible for me to describe the feeling of that moment," says Holley. "I felt as though everyone in the whole world was watching me."

Holley tuned up for his moment in the sun by singing the national anthem at the NEA Representative Assembly held in Washington, D. C.'s convention center in 1997. That performance earned Holley a loud ovation from the RA's 8,500 delegates.

Later that year, he sent along a tape of his performance to Redskins officials.

About a year later, he was invited to audition. That clinched his selection to sing the anthem at the Redskins game with the Arizona Cardinals on November 21.

"I feel as though I represent a whole lot of people who believe in me," notes Holley, whose wife and two sons lent support from the stands.

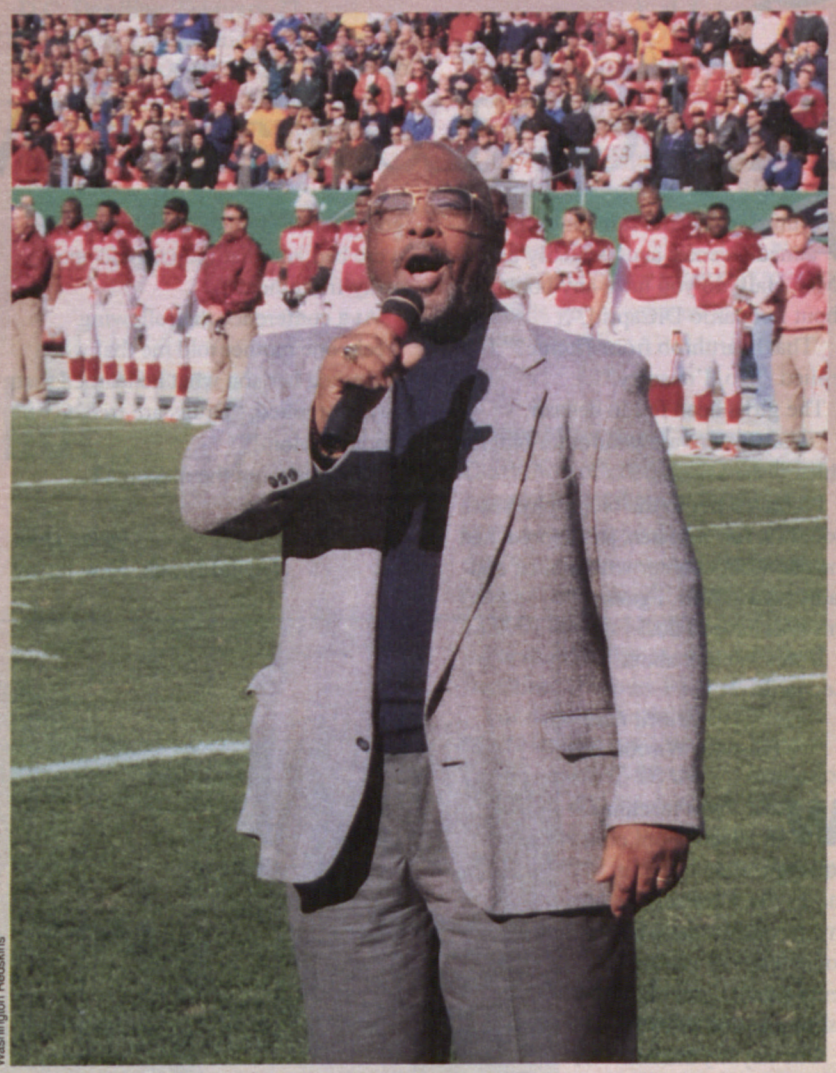
In addition to attending the game as a guest of the Redskins, Holley also received a Redskins Yearbook as a token of appreciation.

Holley retired from teaching in 1996 after 34 years in the classroom as a biology and chemistry teacher.

And, although he's retired, Holley says he's going to stay involved in education in some way.

Off the field and convention floors, he lends his strong voice to three different church choirs in his native Virginia.

"Music and helping kids are a major part of my life," he says. "I'm going to maintain my ties with both."



Washington Redskins

Al Koontz

Party of FIVE!!

Karla Jansen and her husband Jeff knew for months that she was carrying quintuplets, but it was still quite a shock to see them all on July 7 when Elijah James, Tayor Marie, Miranda Nicole, Nicholas Anthony, and Carter Thomas were born at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha.

The Jansens are the parents of the first quintuplets ever born in Nebraska. They also have a 13-year-old daughter, Nicole.

So, what's it like in a home with quints, now five months old?

"It's a morning, noon, and night experience, taking care of them," notes **Karla Jansen,** a special education teacher at Oakland-Craig High School, an hour from Omaha. "But it's a great feeling knowing that I have five healthy babies, because statistically the odds are against it."

Local businesses have come through with a range of donations—from baby food to diapers, cribs to car seats—and individuals have called to help. Local reporters have been running regular updates on the quints' weight since they were born.

Though she has little time to think, Jansen plans to return to teaching, starting out as as a substitute until the kids get older.

"I do miss teaching," says Jansen, "and being in special education, you really get close to the kids. But right now, I have my hands full."

Russia: Now 'N Then

At this year's Michigan Renaissance Festival, Flint teacher **Svetlana Davidek** felt right at home.

She was playing the role of Princess Anna Odoyevskaya, lady of the court and ambassador of Russia to England.

Davidek was right for the part because she was born and lived in Russia, where she taught English for several years.

Just two years ago, she moved to the United States after marrying her husband John, also a Flint educator.

Davidek, who substitute taught last year, now teaches Russian via television to students in several Flint-area school districts.

Davidek says that student interest in learning Russian has fallen now that Russia and the United States are on better terms.

Her interest in festivals grew

100 Bears in **Brave New Worlds**

The day had come. Time for 100 fourth graders to say goodbye to each of their cute and cuddly teddy bears. Time to pack the bears in boxes and hand them over to the local post office so the bears' journey could begin.

This was the scene in Topsfield, Massachusetts. It was one day in late October, all part of a math-geography-language arts skill-building project, coordinated by fourth grade teacher **Linda Cristofaro** and her colleagues. Here's the way it worked.

The TriTown Educational Foundation donated 100 of the six-inch teddy bears. Students then worked on materials to pack along with the bears—a journal and any other small mementos.

All the students were responsible for coming up with places to send their bears. Many chose friends and relatives. Then the bears were ready to mail. The local post office branch sent over a truck to pick up the bears from the students.

When the bears arrived at their destinations, those with temporary custody were supposed to return a postcard to the bears' owners at Proctor School. The note includes information about the bears' temporary homes, as well as their next destinations.

Photos by Michael Quan

As the postcards trickle in, they're tacked on to a giant map at Proctor School, so students can see where their bear friends are.

"We hope the bears will get to five different destinations over the next several months, beginning with states mostly in the South and Southeast," explains Linda Cristofaro. "We develop music, art, and drama activities to enhance the historical and geographic learning that occurs as the children complete state-by-state reports. And the students solve math problems as they track their bears."

Based on last year's experience when about 90 percent of the bears came home, students can expect almost all of this year's batch of bears to return this spring.

Some bears returned to their student-owners last year dressed in clothing appropriate for their area of the country—bathing suits for the stopovers in Florida and mittens and scarves as reminders of some of the cooler climates.

"The kids learn about places many have never been, and they make new friends as well," notes fourth grade resource teacher **Doreen Kelleher**, pictured above, left.

"after I visited a friend from Annapolis, Maryland," Davidek explains. "People were having so much fun, dressing up, playing music, interacting with the crowds. Everything was just so fascinating to me. I didn't want to leave."

That's when Davidek decided to audition for a role in Michigan's Renaissance Festival production last fall.

She made the cast and, in February, when rehearsals began, Davidek was playing the role of Princess Anna, who's married to Vladimir Alexandrovich, cousin of Ivan the Terrible, Russia's first czar.

"It takes time to develop your character, to learn to speak correctly, to learn how to bow and dance," says Davidek, who also created her own costume.

For most of the roles, actors improvise their lines, notes Davidek, but that doesn't mean they can just wing it.

"We're in character all the time," Davidek says, "so we must learn all the backgrounds of the characters to be able to interact with them intelligently."

Count on **Custodians**

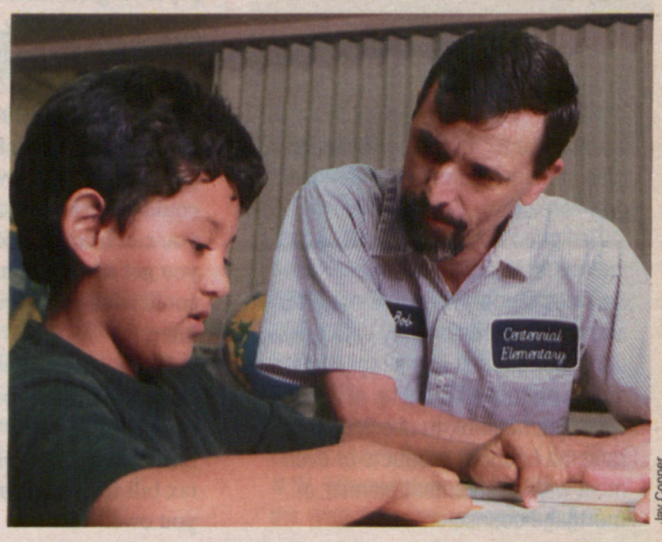
Bob Henderson sees his job as a custodian at Centennial Elementary in Tampa, Florida, as something more than keeping the school safe and clean. He's part of the education team.

So, every day for 15 minutes, Henderson helps eight-year-old Jesus, a second grader, read.

The idea came from Centennial's reading intervention coordinator, who talked with staffers about ways they could help children of migrant farm workers. Custodial staffers decided the best way they could help was to read one-on-one with the kids.

Each of the six custodians at Centennial mentors one student five days a week from 2:00 to 2:15.

"What we try to do is help them sound out their words," says Henderson. "It's great because it spares the teachers' classroom time and gives the kids confidence."



Jay Conner

Money

Getting Started

I'm in the market for a new car. How do I decide whether to buy or lease, and what should I look for in a lease?

If you have expensive taste but a modest bank account, leasing can be hard to beat. You can drive out of a dealer's lot in a luxury model car for a small up-front fee and lower monthly payments than you'd owe on a loan.

But be careful—leasing isn't for everyone, and it's easy to get trapped in a bad lease.

Don't even look at a lease if you intend to drive the car for a long time. Loan payments eventually stop; lease payments don't.

You also shouldn't consider a lease if you want to save money over the long term or if you think you'll want to trade in the car before the lease is up.

On the other hand, think about a lease if you don't have a car to trade in, you don't have the cash for a down payment, or you want to drive a new car every few years.

If leasing is for you, here's how to avoid getting trapped in a bad lease:

■ **Don't underestimate your mileage needs.** If you think you'll drive more than the 12,000 to 15,000 miles per year typically allowed on a lease, buy excess mileage in advance. It's usually cheaper than paying for extra miles when you turn in the car.

■ **Buy gap insurance.** It will cover the difference between what you owe on the lease and what the car is worth if it's stolen or totaled in an accident.

■ **Don't lease the car for a longer period than you expect to drive it.** Many people assume that a long-term lease is cheaper, but a short-term lease—say two years—may be better.

Did You Know?

. . . that the NEA Member Benefits Web site now features a "member-only" area?

Designed exclusively for NEA members, the online Member Services Center lets you E-mail NEA Member Benefits directly with questions, comments, and suggestions.

Log on to the Web site, at www.neamb.com, to check current rates on financial products or even meet with a retirement planner or mortgage counselor.

Can You Afford . . . ?

A Taxing Dilemma

Can't pay your tax bill? Don't panic—here's help.

Now that the last of the holiday bills has rolled in and you've figured you're not going to dig out of debt until December, people are starting to talk about taxes.

No one likes tax time. But if you owe additional money on taxes and you don't have it, tax time can be downright painful. That can happen when you're just starting out in a job and your income is uneven, or if you've earned extra income from tutoring or consulting.

Whatever the reason, if you don't have cash on hand to pay your 1998 tax bill, don't panic. File a return anyway. Failing to file is a more serious offense than failing to pay. When you fail to file, there's a penalty of 5 percent a month or any fraction of a month, plus other interest and penalties.

So now you've got to figure out how to come up with the balance you owe. The simplest solution is to get a loan from the federal government by filling out the installment agreement request form, known as Form 9465. Attach it to your return and indicate an amount that you intend to pay each month.

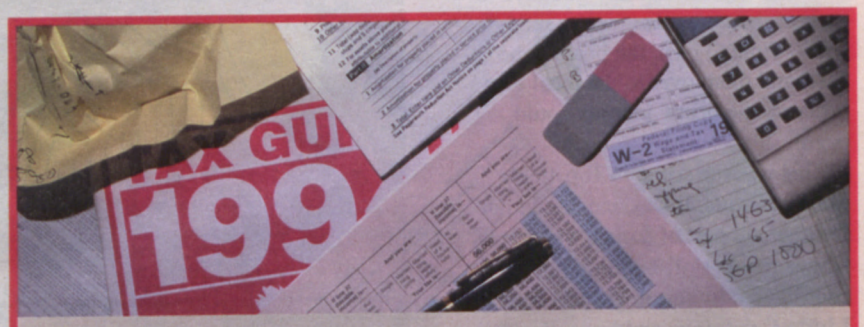
The IRS promises to let you know within 30 days whether your plan is acceptable. Interest—currently about 8 percent—and penalties will also be due. If your plan is accepted, the IRS will bill you each month.

Some taxpayers worry that there's a stigma attached to borrowing from the government or letting the IRS know they can't cover taxes.

"There is no stigma except for the psychological feeling that people don't want to owe money to the IRS," says Jeff Schnepper, author of the best-seller, *How to Pay Zero Taxes*.

If you don't want to borrow from the government, Schnepper suggests a personal loan to cover the bill. "You could probably get a better rate than you can from the IRS," he says. "If you get a home equity credit line, you could even get a deduction for the interest."

If your case is desperate—if you truly cannot pay your taxes—you may be able to make an "offer in compromise," which allows you to settle your tax bill for something less than what you owe.



Is Your Return Really Ready?

What's the most common mistake people make on their tax returns? Simple math errors, say folks at the IRS. Here are some other key mistakes to avoid:

- Failing to list a Social Security number for each dependent. If you don't provide the number, the IRS will disallow the dependent, even if it is a baby.
- Making a mistake on the earned income credit. If you have household income under $30,095 and two or more children, or income under $26,173 and one child, you may qualify for a tax credit. If you have no children, you may qualify if your income is under $10,030.
- Failing to itemize deductions if it is to your advantage. Single? You should itemize if your deductions exceed $4,250, which is the standard deduction. Couples should itemize if deductions exceed $7,100.
- Forgetting to file schedule C if you have any self-employment income, which might include babysitting, day care, tutoring, consulting, or any home-based business, no matter how small. Schedule C allows you to deduct all business expenses, including use of your home, telephone, equipment, and supplies.
- Forgetting to file as head of household if you qualify. Any single person who provides a home for a dependent such as a child or elderly parent may file as head of household and pay considerably less in taxes. So may a parent who provides the use of his or her home to a single adult child.

What's a reasonable offer? Review the files at your local district IRS office to see what kinds of offers have been accepted. This is public information, but names of the taxpayers are confidential.

If you have a problem that seems unresolvable—anything from trying to get a straight answer on an IRS requirement to replacing a lost or stolen refund check—call your local IRS office and ask for a problems resolution officer (PRO), a taxpayer advocate employed by the IRS to solve just such dilemmas.

Remember that taxpayers do have rights. "We're not out to kill people," says Pat Berliner, a PRO in Long Island, New York. "We want to work with people, to work out a schedule, to help bring them back into the system."

—Mary Rowland

Resources

April 15 is right around the corner. Are you worrying how you're going to pay your tax bill?

Before you take out a high-interest loan or borrow from friends and family, consider a home equity loan or line of credit.

If you already own your home and need money for taxes (or other reasons), the NEA Home Financing Program® home equity loan is the low-cost way to borrow. You can access the equity in your home so you'll have cash available when you need it. And, in most cases, the interest is tax-deductible!

For more information on the NEA Home Financing Program home equity loan and line of credit, call the NEA Mortgage QuickLine® at 800/NEA-4-YOU (800/632-4968), 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Friday, and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, ET.

How Are You Doing?

Is Your Pension Portable?

Planning a move? Make sure you can pack your pension.

Who:
Richard Mullin, 73, retired high school English teacher and former president of the East Ramapo Teachers Association, New York

Financial Goal:
To maximize "pension portability"

Game Plan:
Mullin taught in New York's East Ramapo Central School District for 32 years—but he began his teaching career in New Jersey.

"When I transferred, I inquired about my pension—specifically, whether or not I'd be given some type of credit for the five years I taught in New Jersey," says Mullin. "Fortunately, under the pension laws in New York at that time, I was able to purchase service credit, or to pay a certain amount and receive credit for the years I taught out-of-state.

"When I retired in 1995, my pension thus reflected the fact that I taught for 32 years in New York, plus five years in New Jersey," Mullin adds.

Mullin considers himself lucky, since the state of New York no longer gives credit for prior out-of-state public school teaching. But according to Sheila Salenger, a member of the board of directors of the New York State Teachers Retirement System, pending legislation would allow New York educators to claim credit for teaching in other states.

The Experts Say:
If you're thinking of moving to another state, you should find out as much as you can about your current pension plan—as well as the laws governing educators' pensions in the state you're moving to—so that you can take advantage of "pension portability."

Here are some questions to ask:

■ *What is my current plan's vesting schedule?* Most public employee plans have adopted a five-year vesting period—that is, the amount of time you have to put in before you're entitled to pension benefits. But a stricter vesting standard of 10 years is still common.

If you never stay with one employer long enough to become vested, you'll have no pension when you retire. On the other hand, if you change jobs frequently but stay with each employer long enough to become vested, you'll receive a pension—but you probably won't collect as much as you would have if you'd stayed with one employer.

■ *Once I'm vested, what happens to the money if I change jobs?* Most educator retirement systems allow members to purchase service credit for out-of-state teaching. These provisions provide "portability" for educators who have moved from state to state during their careers.

Currently, 45 states allow teachers to purchase service credit. New York and North Carolina allow teachers hired before a certain date to purchase credit. Five states—California, Hawaii, Idaho, Minnesota, and Oregon—don't have these provisions.

If you're allowed to purchase credit, find out if there's a maximum number of years of credit that you may buy—it's usually 10 years—and how much it will cost to purchase credit. Some states base the cost on your compensation, while others use a method that's based on the actuarial cost of providing the additional retirement benefits—and that'll cost you more.

If you decide to change jobs, squeeze the maximum from your vested benefit. If the state you're moving to doesn't have purchase of service credit provisions, or you decide to decline that option, you may have a choice between taking your money in a lump sum—which you can roll into an IRA—or leaving it in your old employer's plan. If you leave it, the benefit will be frozen.

Leo Sorel

Retired English teacher Richard Mullin says he's one of the lucky ones—he transferred from New Jersey to New York in the 1960s without losing any pension credits.

Resources

Planning for retirement should be a long-range effort—not a last-minute scramble. While you may be looking forward to a pension or Social Security, is it going to be enough to maintain your desired lifestyle?

To help you plan for a financially secure retirement, the NEA Valuebuilder® Mutual Fund and Annuity Programs now offer both traditional and Roth IRAs.

Or, if you've planned adequately for your retirement and would like to help your children or grandchildren, the Valuebuilder Programs offer new education IRAs.

All three products are available through new contributions as well as through qualified rollovers and transfers.

To find out more about investing in an IRA through the NEA Valuebuilder Programs, contact your local NEA Valuebuilder Financial Service Representative, or call NEA Member Benefits through Nationwide Financial Services at 800/NEA-VALUE (800/632-8258).

Continuing On

Does it make sense to invest overseas?

Lots of investors have grown discouraged about international investing over the past five years. But the idea still has merit.

Investment markets move in cycles. Sometimes U.S. stocks do well, sometimes bonds outperform, and sometimes international stocks outperform those in the U.S. So a savvy investor diversifies across these asset classes.

Over the past five years though, the stocks of large U.S. companies have beaten all other groups of assets. At the same time, stocks in Japan, which once led the international parade, have fallen.

Further, a strong U.S. dollar has hurt investments made overseas by U.S. citizens. That's because when you invest abroad, your dollar is converted into that country's currency. When the dollar rises, your investment is worth less.

Finally, investments in emerging markets—Latin America, the Far East, and Eastern Europe—have fallen apart over the past year.

All of these things together have caused many U.S. investors to pull out of international investing. But that's shortsighted. It still pays to diversify. Sometimes things make the best investment sense just when they look their worst.

Many professional investors say that Europe is an attractive investment right now. Some investors with a high risk tolerance are even betting on Japan as a turnaround. The important thing to do as an investor is to take the long view.

Retiring Soon?

Thinking about retirement? Don't forget that membership in NEA-Retired offers you a continuation of Association activism, benefits tailored to your needs as a retiree, plus workshops, conferences, and volunteer opportunities.

You'll also receive *NEA Retired* magazine, a bimonthly publication covering Association news and the latest on Social Security, pension, and health issues—as well as feature articles on NEA-Retired members around the country.

Join now as a pre-retired member. Contact NEA-Retired, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. On the Web at www.nea.org/retired.

NEA Elections Report

The Campaign Revenue and Expenses of 1998 Candidates for NEA Office

NEA Standing Rule 10.E provides as follows:

Campaign Expenses. No portion of dues money collected at the local, regional, state, or national level shall be used to promote the candidacy of any individual for an NEA office.

Using forms provided by the Committee on Constitution, Bylaws, and Rules, each candidate shall file a preliminary report of campaign revenues and expenses, including projected revenues and expenses, with the committee prior to the opening of nominations at the Representative Assembly. A final report, on the forms provided by the committee, must be filed with the committee no later than thirty (30) days following certification of the election results. The committee shall report to the Representative Assembly, prior to any nominations or elections, whether any candidate has in any manner violated the election rules and regulations. The final report of campaign revenues and expenditures shall be printed in an appropriate NEA publication for inspection by any member.

The following reports were filed in a timely manner and are printed pursuant to Rule 10.E. Candidates are listed below by office and by alphabetical order within each office.

Candidates for Executive Committee

SOURCES OF REVENUE		EXPENSES	
Cash		Printing	$ 918.74
Persons within the state	$ 1,210.00	Mailing	0
Groups within the state	0	Other media materials	712.89
Persons outside the state	1,655.00	Hospitality and entertainment	0
Groups outside the state	0	Campaign Committee Expenses	14.00
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fundraising activities	253.00	Giveaway(s), if any	170.00
Donations in kind	0	Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	214.20
Total	$ 3,118.00	Total	$2,029.83

Signed: **Robert Gilchrist**

SOURCES OF REVENUE		EXPENSES	
Cash		Printing	$ 3,031.43
Persons within the state	$ 7,452.00	Mailing	198.75
Groups within the state	500.00	Other media materials	2,427.38
Persons outside the state	2,260.00	Hospitality and entertainment	723.28
Groups outside the state	0	Campaign Committee Expenses	9,700.08
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fundraising activities	5,185.00	Giveaway(s), if any	1,369.55
Donations in kind	3,751.00	Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	684.79
Total	$19,148.00	Total	$18,135.26

Signed: **Denise Rockwell (Woods)**

SOURCES OF REVENUE		EXPENSES	
Cash		Printing	$ 9,279.85
Persons within the state	$ 2,856.20	Mailing	863.49
Groups within the state	3,157.26	Other media materials	3,505.13
Persons outside the state	2,568.50	Hospitality and entertainment	450.00
Groups outside the state	1,352.00	Campaign Committee Expenses	9,509.26
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fundraising activities	6,184.50	Giveaway(s), if any	4,558.53
Donations in kind	3,558.58	Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	452.08
Total	$19,677.04	Total	$28,618.34

Signed: **Roger Sharp**

Candidates for NEA Director, ESP At-Large

SOURCES OF REVENUE		EXPENSES	
Cash		Printing	$ 638.20
Persons within the state	$ 215.00	Mailing	222.65
Groups within the state	0	Other media materials	145.00
Persons outside the state	0	Hospitality and entertainment	0
Groups outside the state	0	Campaign Committee Expenses	329.20
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fundraising activities	2,100.00	Giveaway(s), if any	0
Donations in kind	0	Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
Total	$ 2,315.00	Total	$1,335.05

Signed: **Jackie Aubrey**

SOURCES OF REVENUE		EXPENSES	
Cash		Printing	$1,350.00
Persons within the state	$1,448.75	Mailing	370.90
Groups within the state	0	Other media materials	46.46
Persons outside the state	125.00	Hospitality and entertainment	0
Groups outside the state	0	Campaign Committee Expenses	163.00
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fundraising activities	0	Giveaway(s), if any	367.00
Donations in kind	500.00	Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
Total	$2,073.75	Total	$2,297.36

Signed: **Jeanne Daggett-Kemp**

SOURCES OF REVENUE		EXPENSES	
Cash		Printing	$232.00
Persons within the state	$ 0	Mailing	13.29
Groups within the state	450.00	Other media materials	9.50
Persons outside the state	0	Hospitality and entertainment	0
Groups outside the state	0	Campaign Committee Expenses	336.00
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fundraising activities	150.00	Giveaway(s), if any	0
Donations in kind	0	Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	10.00
Total	$600.00	Total	$600.79

Signed: **Pat Matosky-Lekan**

SOURCES OF REVENUE		EXPENSES	
Cash		Printing	$150.00
Persons within the state	$ 100.00	Mailing	25.00
Groups within the state	325.00	Other media materials	0
Persons outside the state	50.00	Hospitality and entertainment	0
Groups outside the state	0	Campaign Committee Expenses	176.00
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fundraising activities	91.00	Giveaway(s), if any	140.00
Donations in kind	566.00	Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	75.00
Total	$1,132.00	Total	$566.00

Signed: **Nancy G. Toombs**

Candidate for At-Large Administrator

SOURCES OF REVENUE		EXPENSES	
Cash		Printing	$ 463.92
Persons within the state	$1,096.38	Mailing	187.81
Groups within the state	0	Other media materials	0
Persons outside the state	305.00	Hospitality and entertainment	0
Groups outside the state	0	Campaign Committee Expenses	0
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fundraising activities	0	Giveaway(s), if any	949.65
Donations in kind	0	Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
Total	$1,401.38	Total	$1,601.38

Signed: **Relzie Payton**

My Turn

'Stifle the Mantra for Change'

Paradigm shifting was unheard of in the bamboo classroom of this teacher's youth. And no one missed it.

By Ramnath Subramanian

My elementary school classroom in India consisted of a thatched roof, supported on eight bamboo poles. When it rained and the wind blew the rain inside, we would move all the benches and desks to the far end of the shelter.

When this task was accomplished, our teacher, Mr. Biswas, would continue with the lesson. A blackboard on a tripod stood in the middle of the class space. There were no walls.

On summer days, I remember a pleasant breeze that brought the scent of jasmine and the sound of bells from a temple nearby. On monsoon days in Calcutta when the rain came down in sheets, school was sometimes cancelled.

This was the setting for algebra, for Kabir and Tulsidas, for *Oliver Twist* and *She Stoops to Conquer*. My school bag was full of textbooks and a thick notebook for copying down everything my teacher wrote on the blackboard.

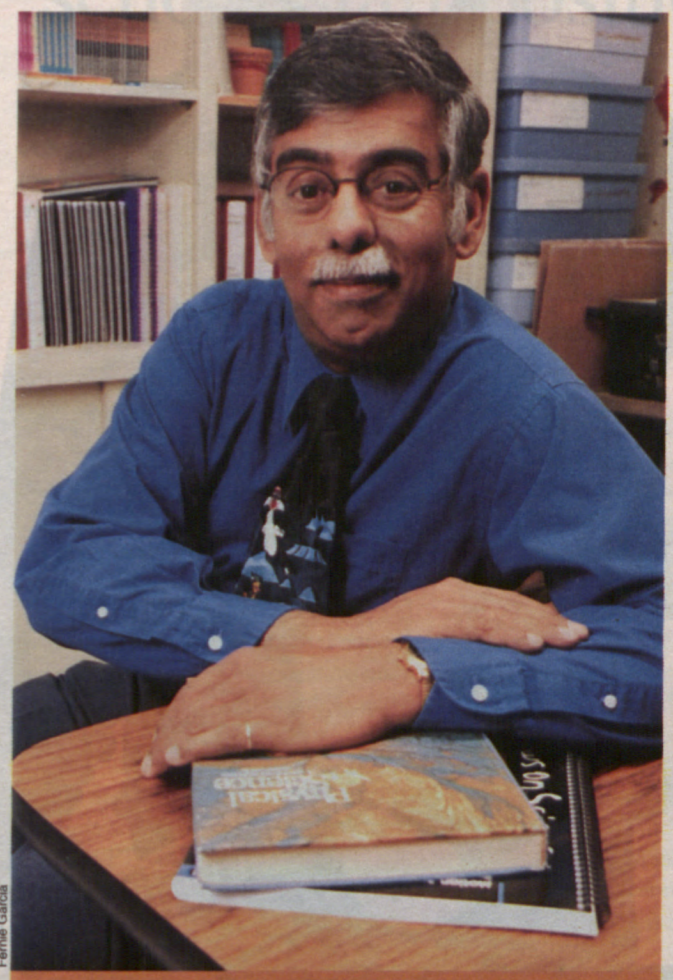
I carried two other things with me to school: a tiffin box and the ubiquitous Enid Blyton. Every free minute that I got, I would dip into one of her *Famous Five* or *Secret Seven* books. I was addicted to them.

In India, books are sacred objects. During the festival of Saraswati Puja, all the books and musical instruments in the household are brought together and placed in front of an image of Saraswati, the goddess of learning, so that they may receive her blessings.

It goes without saying that in a country where books are worshipped, teachers are held in the highest esteem.

Now I'm a sixth-grade teacher at an elementary school in urban El Paso, where taxpayers spend $4,000 to educate each student each year. When I was going to school, my parents paid the equivalent of $3 a month, plus the cost of books, to send me to school.

My students now have access to sophisticated computers, color laser printers, video and digital cameras, the Internet, and a plethora of instructional materials on CD-Rom. An elementary school student in India typically has no access to any such technology.



Fernie Garcia

Ramnath Subramanian teaches sixth grade at Hacienda Heights Elementary School in El Paso, Texas. He can be reached via E-mail at an193@rgfn.epcc.edu.

And yet I've come to believe that the wall-less, bare-bones classroom of my youth was a vastly superior place of learning.

What made the difference wasn't just the passion of teachers to teach and the devout willingness of students to learn—although both were plentiful.

It was also the focus, a clear idea of positioning and purpose (albeit classical in stance), and the healthy *savoir faire* that results when people feel sure about what they're doing.

In India, curriculum, textbooks, and philosophies didn't change periodically. Paradigm shift didn't even enter the lexicon. Parents didn't question teachers, their motives, or pedagogy. And it was unheard of that any classroom or school matter would ever become elevated to litigious levels.

Everyone agrees that education needs to be America's number one priority. Everyone agrees that American culture and classrooms suffer from the challenges brought on by new socioeconomic forces.

Some feel that new programs and more money will be enough to meet these challenges. But those who insist on more money and new programs alone fail to see that so much more is being done with so much less in so many different places.

Perhaps we ought to be considering some simpler steps.

For example, we can make sure that our educational system isn't defined by constant flux and change. There's no need for changing textbooks every five to 10 years. There's no need for playing hopscotch with pedagogical variations. And we certainly don't need to be playing host to a shifting field of experts and consultants with their prodigious pockets.

It would help if we stifled the mantra for change and instead picked something that works, then stayed the course with it, trusting teachers to get the job done.

We talk about having high expectations for students. But politicians, policy makers, and administrators need to have high expectations for teachers. When they do, teachers will feel truly valued.

I have vivid memories of sitting in a classroom while Mr. Biswas read to us from Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley. His voice was rich and passionate and soft. And there was nary a chance that some unwelcome announcement over the intercom would undo the magic of the reading or sully the song of the rain.

You Said It

Bill Fischer, editor

We write about all sorts of learning improvement projects in *NEA Today*. What's really nice about these articles is how often they help expand the reach of great ideas.

Two years ago, for instance, we reported on a special math curriculum put together by Colorado Springs math teacher Al Ludwig and his colleagues. Disturbed by poor student performance in early high school math courses, Ludwig's math team designed a course that gives struggling math students intensive instruction. The course is called Mastery Math-Tough Math.

In our original story, we reported that about 600 students at Liberty High, Ludwig's home school, and 4,000 students throughout Colorado had completed the course. Approximately 30,000 students in 27 states had been taught elements of the Mastery Math course.

Now, in part due to our *NEA Today* coverage, elements of the Mastery Math-Tough Math program and a related new algebra course are being used by students in all 50 states, plus a host of foreign countries. You can find out more by E-mailing toughmath@aol.com.

Another example: Last February, *NEA Today* featured David Neils. A Hewlett Packard employee, Neils heads a program that links students with working professionals via E-mail. The goal: to help students in math, science, communications, and career/education planning.

When our story came out, the telementoring program had paired several hundred students with H-P employees through E-mail. Last month, Neils told us that the mentorship project is now a project at Colorado State University, involving 1,500 students in five countries.

These kids are teaming up with adults working at everything from art to high-tech. Other companies have signed up, too. Neils is now aiming to reach 10,000 students.

For details, go to: http://www.telementor.org or call 888/453-0635 and help forge another *NEA Today* learning connection!

Bill Fischer

Meet

Carly Simon

'A Natural Voice'

Carly Simon's known for her singing, but she has plenty of passion for reading and writing, too.

For 30 years, Carly Simon's been packing raw emotion into song. But the past few years have been more emotional than any performance. Simon's mother died. And Simon was diagnosed with breast cancer.

In spite of the difficult times, Simon continues to write songs and sing. And she continues, as she has for years, to devote time to children's culture and children's books.

Simon's written children's songs, books, even an opera for children. And she's been a strong supporter of NEA's Read Across America.

Carly Simon spoke recently with Read Across America coordinator Dave McGloin.

With all the good causes out there, why support NEA's Read Across America?
Reading is one of the top three or four things in my life that have brought me the greatest pleasure. I think Read Across America is trying to turn kids on to reading. That's great, especially when there is so much available that's a quicker fix. I'm sounding like part of another generation, but I guess I am.

I understand you're a big Dr. Seuss fan.
Yes. He has such an internal meter going on. He knows how to talk with kids in a very natural voice that brings together values, fun, and an ability to communicate. The other great thing about Seuss is that he's the great melting pot. Everybody can understand and enjoy Seuss.

When you write for children, what do you write about?
I always write about love—the love and faith that kids have to have to grow up strong. I also write about magic.

My latest book, *Midnight Farm*, is about two of my godchildren waking up and going to see the animals, vegetables, and insects all coming alive in the magical time between 12 and one in the morning.

Did you read with your children—both adults and musicians now—when they were growing up?
It was an essential part of every day. I would read three or four books and then we'd turn off the lights, and I'd make up my own stories. They began to prefer those because I could take all kinds of liberties. I could bring in our dog, the pediatrician, the doorman. It became a living, breathing story that changed according to cues from them or the mood I was in that night.

With your dad heading up Simon and Schuster publishing, was your own childhood full of stories and books?
My father was a big promoter of children's literature. He published books like *The Three Little Pigs* and *Tuggy the Tugboat*. He would ask everyone he knew to write children's books. My brother's nurse wrote a bestseller. And he would try out new books on us.

Also, as a child, I would escape into books. I grew up with a terrible stammer, and I couldn't really speak. It became such a problem for me that I would get a terrible stomachache when I had to go to school. I was afraid I would be asked to read aloud. For me, air would come out of my mouth and no words.

What did you do to overcome your problem?
I practiced substituting words. When I was having trouble saying one sound, I'd shift to a word that meant the same thing but started with a different sound. At times, I just didn't talk. And sometimes I sang.

Did teachers help you?
I had one teacher in fourth grade who was so understanding and wonderful. He would never call on me to read, or he'd ask me to read one sentence. When I was standing outside the classroom in the hall shaking, not able to come in, he would come out in the hall with a yo-yo, and every day he would teach me a new trick to lure me into the class. He was a tremendously compassionate teacher.

How have you dealt with your illness?
With breast cancer, I feel as though I've been to hell and back. At times, it has brought me to my knees. But you can learn so much from the people you meet along the way, from the love and care they give you.

You've also lost your mother
I find myself thinking, wait, who's going to take me to the hospital? In the deepest recesses of ourselves, I think we look to our parents to hold our hands. Still, one of my big lessons has been learning to hold my own hand. I have had wonderful support, but I didn't always count on people to take me to my chemo treatments. At times, I'd take myself, realizing I could hold my own hand.

Are you writing songs about what you've been through?
Going through chemo and the hell it causes in your mind and the fear—that changes you. The things I'm writing for adults are closer to my soul. I don't know whether I can convey it on a record, but I know I can feel it.

Will you become a spokesperson for breast cancer?
I think a lot about people in some small towns who can't get the same kind of care I received. But I'm not the kind of person to stand up in front of a large group and talk. I don't want to do that. My natural voice will not be heard across a television screen.

I had a wonderful woman mentor me through my whole breast cancer ordeal. She called me every day. She still calls me every day. Now I'm trying to be that kind of mentor for three other women who are living with breast cancer. That's my natural voice.

Resources

- In *Midnight Farm*, Carly Simon tells the story of two brothers who join the plants and animals on their Martha's Vineyard farm in nighttime revelry. Written in verse for kids ages 4-8. Simon & Schuster, $16.
- *Mother Goose's Basketful of Rhymes*, a board book and audiocasette, features Simon's voice and music she composed. $9.99 exclusively at Target stores this spring.
- For more information on NEA's Read Across America, go to the Web at www.nea.org/readacross. Also see page 7 of this issue.

Debate

Should PTAs be allowed to fund school staff positions?

Yes

Kathleen Gordon is a library information specialist at Denn John Middle School in Kissimmee, Florida. An educator for more than 27 years, Gordon has served as an Association activist on the local and state level. In 1997, she was named the Osceola County Middle School Vocational Teacher of the Year.

Any and all measures parents can take to enhance a school's learning environment should not just be permitted—they should be welcomed with open arms.

When PTA members are allowed to contribute by funding staff positions, kids get more than just the benefit of an extra adult's time. They—and the entire school community—get a renewed sense of pride, self-reliance, and self-worth.

Seeing parents at work to help their child's school makes students proud of their family. It creates a sense of the importance of education. And it gives students the chance to learn about civic responsibility.

When PTAs are allowed to fund programs and people, parents get more involved in all aspects of education. They see firsthand what their school needs, and they have ownership in the school's progress.

That, in turn, creates and promotes harmony, not violence. It encourages support for the entire school program. And it builds a cohesiveness that dispels separatism and elitism.

Allowing PTAs the chance to help also empowers parents, particularly those in poor urban or rural districts. Prohibiting them from supporting their school staffs, even with small contributions, is just another way of telling them they can't—and don't—make a difference.

For years, school boards and administrators have allowed big business in, not just to help out, but to market their products to our children.

I say that if Pepsi or Coca-Cola or any other business's motives are altruistic, they don't need a contract to make a contribution. They can make a donation, take a tax write-off, and go home.

But they want contracts—and profits—off our kids. Why let corporations in and prohibit PTAs? Our parents aren't looking for contracts—they're only looking out for our kids.

Now some say that allowing PTAs to fund staff positions will increase inequities among schools and school districts. But let's face it: Inequities already exist—and have been around as long as public schools have existed.

In 1970, as part of the move to integration, I was transferred from a school with an all-Black student body and no nursing staff to a school with a full-time registered nurse paid for by the local PTA.

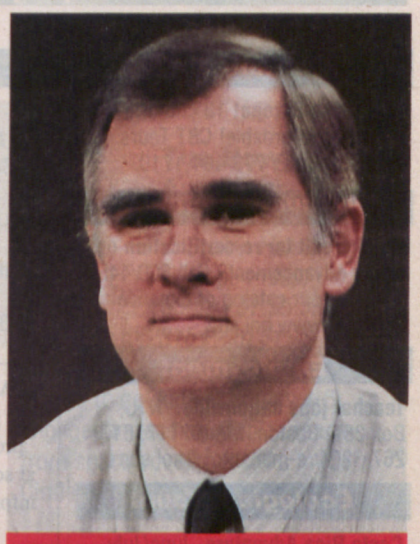
Should the students at my new school have been deprived of these medical benefits because of a bureaucratic policy prohibiting PTAs from funding positions?

It doesn't matter if one PTA can fund a certified teacher or teacher aide, while another can't. What matters is that a need is met, and kids are better off for it.

What's the downside? If school board members consider cutting funds that they believe rich PTAs can make up, then parents can vote them out. The vote is their equalizer.

Given our current times and economy, we'll never be rid of all the inequities. Still, we can build pride and develop responsible, productive citizens when we encourage all to give their best effort to every task.

Yes, inequities exist—in schools, neighborhoods, cities, and counties throughout our nation. But that's no reason to punish our students.



No

Harry Kuhn, a school social worker with 25 years of experience in the Rahway, New Jersey, public schools, has served as an area PTA president and board of education member. He holds master's degrees in educational psychology and social work and can be reached via E-mail at hkuhn@rahway.net.

Allowing PTAs to fund staff positions would put the core democratic values of public education and democracy at risk in more ways than one.

It would undermine:

■ *The freedom of equal educational opportunity.* Public education is just that—open and accessible, free and equal for all enrolled students.

Funding staff positions with private money—from the PTA or any other private group or individual—would create a grievous socioeconomic inequity in the school community. Some would get more, while others get less. That cheats students of equality of access.

If the music teacher's salary is no longer a public expense—shared by all—but is, in fact, private—selective and exclusive—who would be entitled to seats in that classroom? Would seats be reserved only for students whose parents contributed to the music teacher's salary?

Public education is a public trust that gives all children, regardless of their families' financial status, a seat in America's classroom.

■ *The notion of a common good.* In New Jersey, taxpayers would welcome any form of relief from their burden of funding municipal, local education, and county and state government programs and services.

But PTA funding of staff positions strikes at the heart of one of our most cherished social philosophies, first minted in Rahway in 1786, "*E Pluribus Unum.*"

"One from many" guides the weaving of our cultural fabric as a nation of local communities. Rahway is a prime example of a community that is diverse but not divided. Here, we unite for the common good of all, not just for those who can afford more.

■ *The constitutional and political accountability of schools to the taxpaying and voting public.* Boards of education are political bodies empowered by the state constitution to provide a "thorough and efficient education" for all students in New Jersey's public schools.

Funding is provided by the local taxpayers to whom the board of education is accountable for staff performance and student achievement. There is no constitutional basis for PTA—or any private—funding of school staff positions.

Once the door is opened to allow PTAs to fund staff positions, what's next? Will PTAs be allowed to hire and fire? Will banks want to fund business classes? Will professional sport franchises be invited to fund and field high school teams?

Will we eventually arrive at the point where publically funded education no longer exists, replaced by entrepreneurial interests oblivious to their encroachment upon a democratic public trust?

■ *The true mission of the PTA.* As a former PTA president and current member, I feel strongly that the proper role of the PTA is political, educational, and social activism on behalf of children and their school environment.

The PTA recently celebrated 100 years of honorable volunteer service to public schools. PTA members pay their property taxes, not PTA dues, to fund staff positions. And that's as it should be.

What's Your Opinion?

Should PTAs be allowed to fund school staff positions?

To vote, visit our Web site at **www.nea.org/neatoday** and see the results instantly.

Should today's education be relevant to tomorrow's job market?

The tally on this Debate question from the last issue of *NEA Today:*

28% Yes **72% No**

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We invite you to become an Adult Juror or an Adult Leader for KIDS FIRST! This is a truly satisfying volunteer task that uses your experience as an educator, media specialist, librarian or parent that benefits parents and children nationwide.

KIDS FIRST! is an initiative of the not-for-profit Coalition for Quality Children's Media which evaluates children's videotapes, CD-ROM's and television programming designed for ages infant to age 18.

KIDS FIRST! evaluates and rates children's media using a highly acclaimed method that has been praised by parents and educators alike. It utilizes professionally designed criteria and evaluation tools and engages a nationwide volunteer jury comprising child development professionals, teachers, parents and children of diverse geographic, socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.

Adult Jurors: Must hold a degree in child development, education, library sciences, media or a related field.

Adult Leaders: Do not need to meet any academic requirements. Adult Leaders need to be able to facilitate children's Juries.

Contact the Coalition for Quality Children's Media - KIDS FIRST! 505/989-8076, visit the Web at www.cqcm.org or E-mail at jury@cqcm.org.

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The 1999 NEA Educational Support Personnel National Conference

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Technology

Works4Me — nea's e-mail classroom tip of the week!

A weekly practical classroom tip from NEA. Visit the helpfrom.nea.org Web site to sign up to receive this free weekly tip via E-mail.

The Education Technology Promotion Guide from the Software Publishers Association offers guidelines for publishing the success of your educational technology program. A CD-ROM includes letter and press release templates in both MAC and PC formats. To obtain a copy for your local Association, E-mail your name, address and the name of your local to **Shelstar@aol.com**

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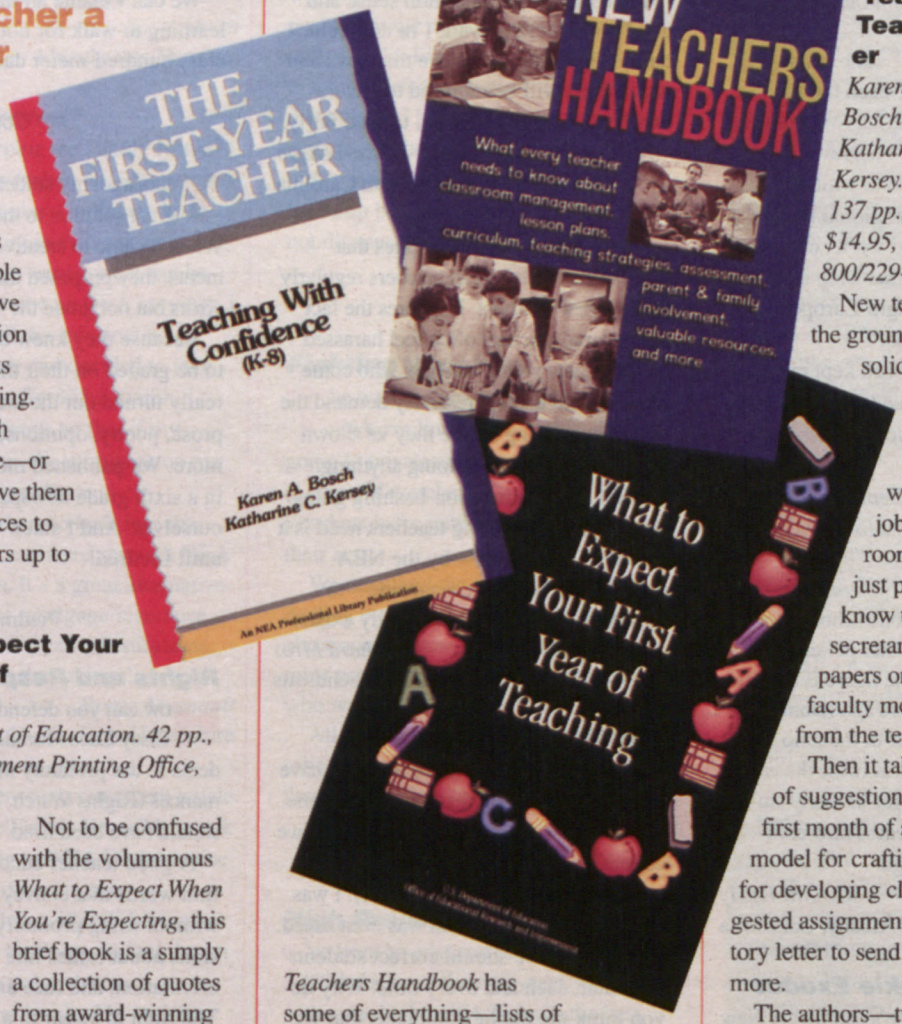
Books

Throw a Rookie a Lifeline

Lend a hand, give a book. And make a new teacher a friend for life.

Here's a quick look at three new books that can do double duty. You can give them as graduation presents for folks going into teaching. Or you can reach across the divide—or the hall—and give them as flotation devices to first-year teachers up to their necks.


THE FIRST-YEAR TEACHER
Teaching With Confidence (K-8)
Karen A. Bosch
Katharine C. Kersey
An NEA Professional Library Publication
FOR TEACHERS—BY TEACHERS
NEW TEACHERS HANDBOOK
What every teacher needs to know about classroom management, lesson plans, curriculum, teaching strategies, assessment, parent & family involvement, valuable resources, and more
What to Expect Your First Year of Teaching

What to Expect Your First Year of Teaching

U.S. Department of Education. 42 pp., $7, U.S. Government Printing Office, 202/512-1800.

Not to be confused with the voluminous *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, this brief book is a simply a collection of quotes from award-winning first-year teachers.

Topics range from the usual frustrations —too many students, too many needs, not enough dollars—to suggestions for reaching out to veteran teachers.

The best chapter, "Voices," offers "meditations" that are thoughtful and inspiring. Like this delightful quip:

"My first year of teaching has been full of many wonderful surprises. I never knew the average teenage girl's voice could hit such octaves. I never expected to reach a point in my life where I would yearn for my bed at 9:30 every night. I was not prepared for the moment I first heard myself ask, 'Does anyone in class not think that spitting on the floor is inappropriate behavior?'"

This book's best audience: novices who just want to know they're not all alone.

New Teachers Handbook

Impact II-The Teachers Network. 77 pp., $14, 212/966-5582.

Drawn from the collected wisdom of 45 experienced teachers, the *New Teachers Handbook* has some of everything—lists of tips, reams of suggestions, quotes from teachers, essays by teachers, and recommended resources.

At its best, this handbook devotes thoughtful attention to things recent graduates probably didn't learn in college—multiple intelligences in theory and practice, time management, working with other teachers, and aligning curriculum with standards and testing.

At its worst, the book includes phrases like "you will want to" and tips like, "You may want to come in a half-hour early or leave a half-hour late."

At its end, the book transcends advice and moves to inspire with a teacher-written essay about hope, revolution, and the call to teach.

"Teachers," Cynthia Carbone Ward writes, "are morally obligated to act in brave and hopeful ways. If our house is flooded, and all that we possess is a thimble, then thimble by thimble we must begin to empty the water. . . . What's more, we must show those within our reach how to cup their hands and help."

When it comes to bailing, this book makes an excellent bucket.

The First-Year Teacher

Karen Bosch and Katharine Kersey. 137 pp., $14.95, 800/229-4200.

New teachers who want to hit the ground running can find a solid game plan in *Teaching With Confidence (K-8)*.

This book starts slow with advice on getting a job, preparing your classroom, buying supplies, and just plain surviving ("Get to know the custodian and the secretary well. Don't correct papers or do lesson planning at faculty meetings. Stay away from the teachers' lounge.")

Then it takes off, with 70 pages of suggestions for every day of the first month of school. You'll find a model for crafting lesson plans, ideas for developing classroom rules, suggested assignments, a sample introductory letter to send to parents, and much more.

The authors—two former classroom teachers, now education professors—say this 30-day plan served a group of 25 teachers well in a field-test. Even if not taken literally, the book seems an excellent point of comparison for those who want assurance that they're covering all the bases.

Two other chapters provide tips in areas that novices truly need —working with parents and saving time. A final chapter on ending the year seems a bit out of place. One hopes most novices are in the swim by then.

—Stefanie Weiss

Note: The NEA Professional Library has several additional booklets for rookies: *Pitfalls and Potholes: A Checklist for Avoiding Common Mistakes of Beginning Teachers* ($4.50), *Countdown to the First Day of School* ($4.50), and *Bright Ideas: A Pocket Mentor for Beginning Teachers* ($4.50). For details or to order, call 800/229-4200.

Books by NEA Members

The New American Storybook
J. Steven Hanna. Vantage Press, Inc., 33 pp., $7.95 plus $.50 s&h to 2315 Pearl St., Suite 10, Tacoma, WA 98406. Four short stories to get kids in grades 4-6 engaged in reading. Topics range from space adventure to "a modern Cinderella" to the circus.

Fashionshowitis
A Guide to Successful Fundraising Fashion Shows. Madonna B. Hanna. Hanna Publishing, 63 pp., $20 to 2315 Pearl St., Suite 10, Tacoma, WA 98406. Step-by-step instructions and advice on how to organize a fashion show that raises money. Includes tips on theme, music, publicity, etiquette, and more.

Love Never Ends
Florence Bishop Wolin. Cornerstone Publishing, Inc., 46 pp., $7.95 plus $3.50 s&h to P.O. Box 2896, Virginia Beach, VA 23450. This collection of poetry and journal entries chronicles the author's struggle to deal with the illness and death of her sister. Sad, yes, but spiritual and inspiring, too. Suitable for ages 13 and up.

The Wine of Astonishment
Mary Overton, La Questa Press, 180 pp., $12 plus $3.95 s&h to La Questa Press, Woodside, CA 94062. A compilation of 13 short stories—from "Mother Machine" to "Fly-by-Night Weddings"—that explore the human and magical sides of life. Suitable for ages 14 and up.

The Pranks an' Enlightenment of Frank an' Me
Robert Wolley. Lifestyle Press, 213 pp., $14.40 for NEA members plus $2.25 s&h to 15 Tracy Circle, East Falmouth, MA 02536. This adventure story for readers ages 11 to 14 brings to life a colorful harbor town full of characters, including young Frank and his best friend.

Letters

War and Remembrance

I'm humbled and thankful that teacher Tom Clark and his students are researching and recording the stories of Indiana soldiers who lost their lives in World War II (People, January). Surely they, and the soldiers they are researching, deserve a place in the history books.

Reading the story brought to mind a day at the end of World War II, when I was a young girl living in the Bronx. Those living on our street decided to celebrate with a block party. A Gold Star mother asked us to please reconsider, since her family had lost its only son.

The adults on our block went ahead with the party that warm evening in the 1940s. Looking back over the years, I've never felt it was the right decision and have often wished that I could find that grieving family and tell them so.

The incident—my first experience with the terrible toll that war takes—put a face and a story behind the numbers, and I've never forgotten it.

Barbara Joan Grubman
Woodland Hills, California

Life's Too Short

The goal of public school should be, as Janette Gerdes writes, to educate children "so they may enjoy full, happy, and productive lives" (Debate, January). To narrow one's education to fit a targeted job market eliminates a vast variety of opportunities in the schools.

There's so much to learn in humanities, sciences, and history classes that helps mold life choices and decisions. There's so much to learn in health classes, physical education, and the arts that helps make students well-rounded, cooperative team players. Focusing on one agenda too early in life is stifling.

I love to see young people's eyes light up with wonder. Life is too short to stop the exploration and wonderment before they even graduate from high school.

Janet Smith
Holland, Ohio

Study Hard, Get Ahead?

Science education professor Alberto Rodriguez's study showing that even the top Latino and African-American students don't score as high as top white and Asian students (Innovators, January) shows that the "meritocracy myth" doesn't need a closer look. It needs to be thrown out entirely.

African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans have been the hardest working people in America for centuries and, as a whole, haven't achieved a lifestyle equal in stature to whites'.

The "social and institutional factors" that some believe "hard work" can erase are the critical factors that keep minorities from achieving Anglo-European-type success in America.

Those factors have been kept purposefully and firmly in place to keep the races unequal and prevent necessary, inevitable change.

Georgene Fountain
Germantown, Maryland

Math Anxiety

You report that "public schools now average one computer per every six students," noting that the figure is half the 1:12 ratio from five years ago (Bottom Line, January). One half of the ratio 1:12 is 1:24. The actual ratio is twice the earlier one. In other words, twice as many students have computer access now compared with five years ago.

Richard Fairly
Albany, California

Halting the Rookie Exodus

I agree with Bob Chase's call for "A New Deal for New Teachers" (President's Viewpoint, November).

It's no wonder that beginning teachers leave the profession in droves. They're often given the most preparations, the most challenging students, the largest classes, and the poorest facilities—all without meaningful mentoring.

Building principals are primarily responsible for the indefensible way many beginning teachers are treated. Almost equally culpable are veteran teachers who pressure principals to give them the most desirable assignments.

I had hoped that common sense and good will would prevail. I'm now reluctantly beginning to believe that laws and regulations will be required to ensure that beginning teachers are treated fairly.

Carl Olson
Cary, North Carolina

Bob Chase's column implies that wicked old veteran teachers regularly pick on new teachers. It ignores the fact that veteran teachers often feel harassed by some new young teachers who come into a school and aggressively demand the best of everything before they've shown themselves capable of doing anything.

With all the education-bashing going on today, the last thing teachers need is a column like this one—by the NEA president in the NEA magazine—to aggravate a division that already exists.

Richard Mros
Taunton, Massachusetts

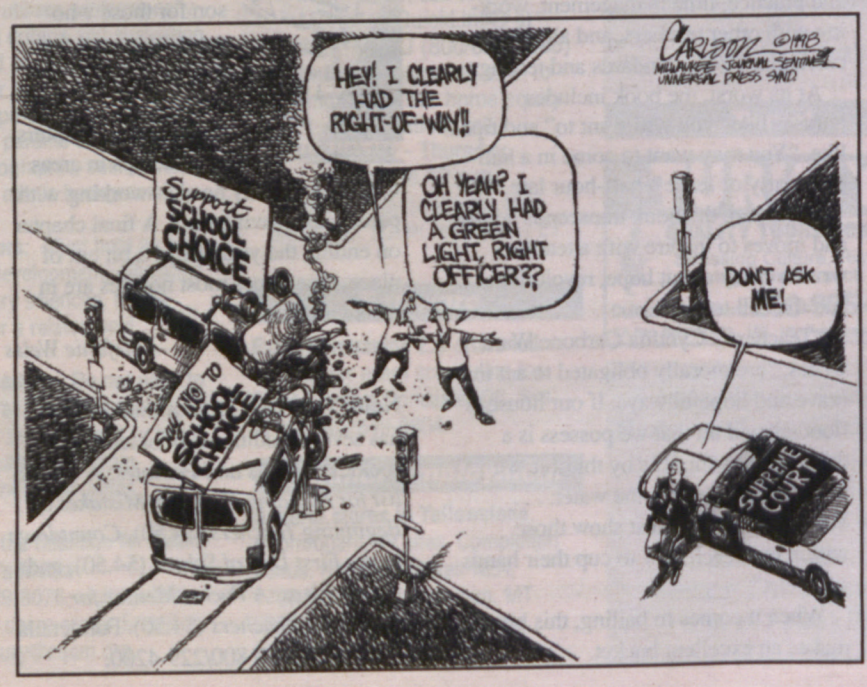
The Grammar Police

Never in my 26 years of teaching have I read anything that has shocked me like your last debate question: "Should we correct students' grammar all the time, every time?" (Debate, November). I was appalled that the question was even asked.

Of course we should correct students' grammar, each and every time. Why do you think the public complains that we graduate seniors who can't spell, write, or communicate in an educated way?

Good grief, folks, let's do everything we can to see that our students leave us with at least the basics.

Mary Prehm
Paris, Tennessee


CARLSON ©1998
HEY! I CLEARLY HAD THE RIGHT-OF-WAY!!
OH YEAH? I CLEARLY HAD A GREEN LIGHT, RIGHT OFFICER??
Support SCHOOL CHOICE
DON'T ASK ME!
SUPREME COURT

A blanket policy of "correcting students' grammar all the time, every time" does nothing for students but lead to confusion about language and its role, diminish confidence in teachers, and increase resentment toward a rigid educational establishment.

We can't blame an infant who's just learning to walk for not running a world-class hundred-meter dash.

Ron Cameron
Council Bluffs, Iowa

Years ago, my students came up with a great solution to the grammar debate. When it came to creative writing assignments, they proposed that I mark the errors but not grade the work.

Because they knew they weren't going to be graded on their thoughts, they really turned out the creative writing—prose, poetry, opinions, essays, and more. We published most of their work in a sixth grade newspaper that we did ourselves. And I stuck with their advice until I retired!

Mary Wilson
Piedmont, South Dakota

Rights and Responsibilities

How can you defend Missouri teacher Cissy Lacks for allowing her students to use profanity in their performances (Rights Watch, November)? She should have been fired.

A good teacher encourages students to find words that convey their feelings without using profanity. Serious discussions about issues like abortion, sexual orientation, and race are educational. The right to swear in a classroom is not.

This case isn't about academic freedom. It's about stupidity, not creativity.

Brad Koenig
Nicollet, Minnesota

Your article "Academic Freedom Takes a Hit" includes excellent documentation of the "violation of teachers' rights," while avoiding any mention of their responsibilities to provide both morally sound instruction and a wholesome learning environment.

If any of the teachers you defend in your article were to "exercise their First Amendment rights" on any of my children or grandchildren, I would pounce on them like a duck on a june bug.

John Guess
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Double Zero

After shaking my head in wonder at the inane intergenerational quiz (Cover story, November), I turned to scan Heroes & Zeroes. The "zero" given to the "Car Talk" guys for their remarks about teachers is shameful. It's indicative of the worst of what NEA stands for: teachers right or wrong vs. everybody else.

"Car Talk" represents clean, venomless humor and dishes out barbs directed at occupations ranging from astronauts to presidents, doctors to car mechanics. Regular listeners know that the show's overwhelming message is one of respect for teachers and the value of education.

NEA gets a double zero on this one.

Scott Aborn
Manchester, Vermont

Are You Covered?

Reading "Keeping the Family Home" (Money, November) brought to mind my own concerns about mortgage insurance. I used to work in the banking industry, and I know how expensive it can be.

So, when I became an NEA member, I looked through all the information on term life insurance and decided to take out a policy. Now, for $45 a month, I have enough coverage so that if my husband passes on, the mortgage on our home could be virtually paid off.

I urge all members to look into the term life insurance offered through NEA Member Benefits. It's a great alternative to the high cost of mortgage insurance offered by banks and other institutions. You won't believe the savings!

Penny Arsenault
Hollis, New Hampshire

The main purpose of your recent article "Keeping the Family Home" is to talk readers into buying an NEA life insurance policy to insure their mortgage.

I have no problem with NEA Member Benefits offering products. In fact, I own an NEA term life policy because it's a good deal. But I'm insulted by articles that clearly have ulterior motives.

Your readers are smart enough to know when we are being manipulated. So keep printing ads, and keep printing articles, but, please, no more "adicles."

David Borst
Altoona, Pennsylvania

Animal Abuse

I was chagrined to see your article about a Nebraska teacher who wrestles steers (People, November). By publishing it, NEA appears to be promoting animal abuse, which is inherent in rodeo events.

Steer wrestling involves a mounted "cowboy" pursuing a steer out of a chute, falling on the animal, and twisting its neck viciously until the steer is finally thrown to the ground.

How about running an article on support for the well-being of animals, rather than on how to dominate them by brute force?

Debra LaBruzzo
Springfield, Massachusetts

Hardship, Not Shame

As a teacher at a teen parent diploma program, I read "Keep Kids From Making Babies" (Health, November) with interest. But I'm concerned about your expert's final remark, encouraging NEA members to "send a clear message that teen pregnancy is not okay."

Without careful consideration, the message teens might receive is that teens who become pregnant are not okay. I'd prefer that we send the message that, with a child, life will be more difficult, reaching personal goals will be more difficult, and having time and space to mature will be more difficult.

It's my hope that the burden and hardship be emphasized in the message, not disapproval, judgment, and shame.

Kathleen Benedetti
Liberty, Maine

Fighting Vouchers

The way to fight the voucher issue is not by railing against public money going to private and parochial schools (Letters, November). The way to fight vouchers is for public schools to clean up their act.

We must end the violence and drug dealing on school grounds and make our classrooms places of learning. And we must protect the rights of the students who want to be in school.

All students have the right to attend school, but they should lose that right if they can't follow the rules.

Robert Conder
Jackson, Tennessee

High Praise

I've been an educator and life member of NEA for more than 40 years, and, without a doubt, *NEA Today* is the best education information format I've ever seen. Each of the "segments" is tailored to meeting educators' needs, as well as those of school children. It's truly impressive.

I use many of the ideas presented in your columns in my classes and pass copies on to my students and two of my daughters who are teachers.

John Cumming
Professor emeritus, teacher education
University of Wisconsin-Superior

Let's Talk

Share your ideas, comments, and opinions with *NEA Today* in one of five ways:

- By mail: Write to Letters, NEA Today, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036
- Through the Web: Go to www.nea.org/neatoday and click on "Submit a Letter to the Editor"
- By E-mail: Write to neatoday@nea.org
- By Fax: 202/822-7206
- By Phone: 202/822-7201

Letters are edited for length and clarity.

A Letter from: Tucson, Arizona

Lessons from the Inside

By Cathy Amanti

I approach the metal detector, hoping I won't set it off. The guard eyes what I'm carrying, ready to search for anything illegal it might contain. My identification is checked to see if I'm permitted to be here. Nothing I'm wearing is against the rules. I'm waved through.

Once inside, my movement is restricted. My day is regulated by clocks, attendance sheets, meal schedules.

The beginning of a typical high school day? Not this time.

This is prison.

In addition to my job as a second grade bilingual teacher, I volunteer in the local federal and state prisons, facilitating weekend-long conflict resolution workshops for inmates and community participants.

It may be hard to believe, but I've learned a lot about teaching from going into prison. Such as:

■ *Schools and prisons are similar in many ways.* They're both large government institutions run by hierarchical bureaucracies. They're both overcrowded. They both have cafeterias and fenced yards and detention.

■ *Teachers, like prison guards, have a huge impact on the inmates' quality of life.* Teachers and prison guards occupy the same layer in their respective bureaucracies—the layer closest to the people the institutions exist to "serve."

That makes me wonder how I'm treating my "inmates." If my students could articulate as well as some of the inmates I've met, would they say I'm arbitrary and authoritarian or that I facilitate their growth and make school a humanizing experience?

■ *Like prisoners, students come to us with "records."* And just like prisoners, students are much more than the sum of the data contained in their records. Judging them by past performance alone is unfair.

■ *Incarcerated parents care about their children.* Many inmates tell me their children are the reason they want to turn their lives around. Like other parents, they want their kids to look up to them. Like other parents, they want to help their kids.

■ *Educators need to be more sensitive to students with incarcerated parents.* Given that most inmates are parents and that the prison population is growing at an astonishing rate, more and more of us will have students with incarcerated family members in our classrooms each year.

Having been sensitized to the tremendous distress children feel at having an imprisoned parent, I try to make my classroom a safe environment where students can share their feelings on this matter.

I talk to my class about my volunteer work in prison. And I share children's literature about characters who are children of inmates. Children need to see their experiences reflected in books. The printed word lends a legitimacy to these experiences, affirming and giving voice to their feelings.

■ *Students need to learn conflict resolution skills in schools, not prisons.* Though this lesson has more to do with the type of volunteer work I do than where I do it, I feel pressure to include these skills in my curriculum.

Most Monday mornings, my students brainstorm and role-play positive solutions to conflicts they have experienced. And one of my classroom rules is also a workshop ground rule: Look for the good in each other. Students practice this during classroom meetings by expressing things that they like about each other.

My prison experiences allow me to step outside my everyday routines. They give me a chance to reflect and view my work through a different lens.

When I take in the big picture, I see the tragedy in all of this. More money is being spent to build prisons at the same time that funds for education are decreasing. And more of our students are finishing their education in prison.

When I take in the small picture, I see that, as teachers, we can only try to reverse this trend, one student at a time.

NEA member Cathy Amanti is a teacher and writer in Tucson, Arizona. She's been published recently in the Christian Science Monitor. *To reach her, send E-mail to amanti@azstarnet.com.*

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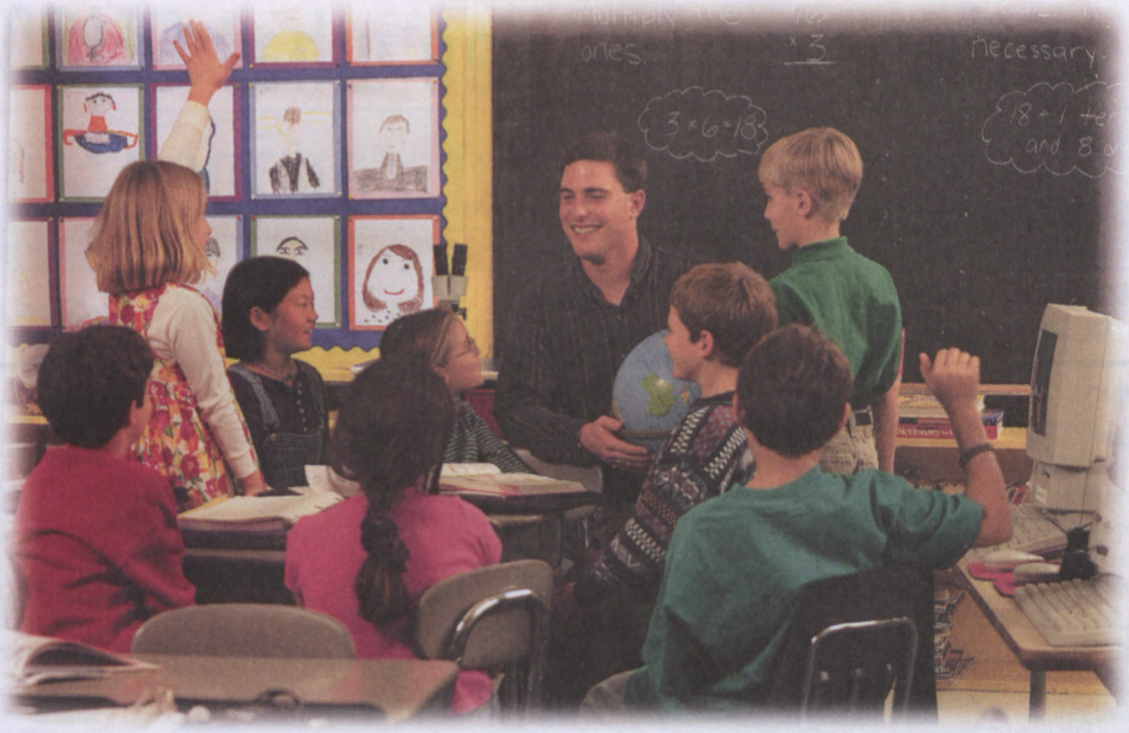

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